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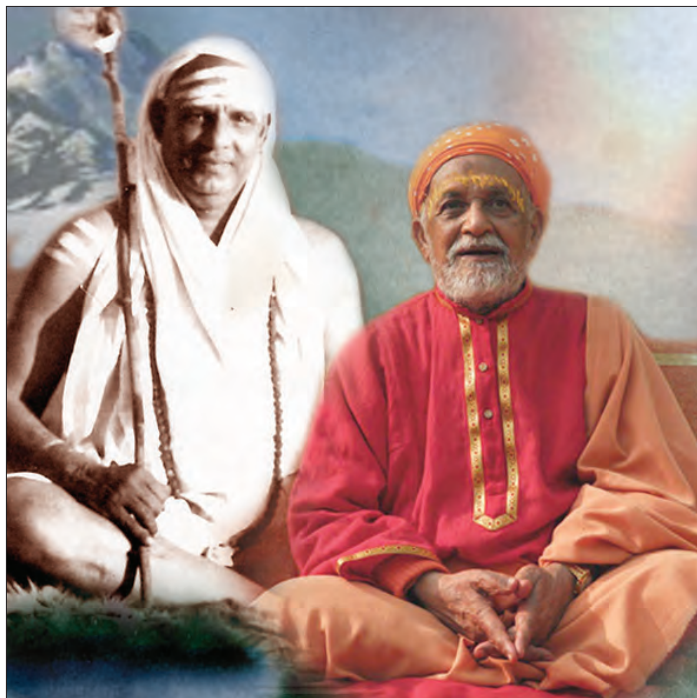
CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCIENCE OF YOGA

Hatha Yoga Book 7

HATHA YOGA AND HEALTH

*From the teachings of
two great luminaries of the 20th century*

Sri Swami Sivananda Saraswati
Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

Hatha Yoga Book 7

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*From the teachings of
two great luminaries of the 20th century*

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*Including answers from the satsangs of
Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati*



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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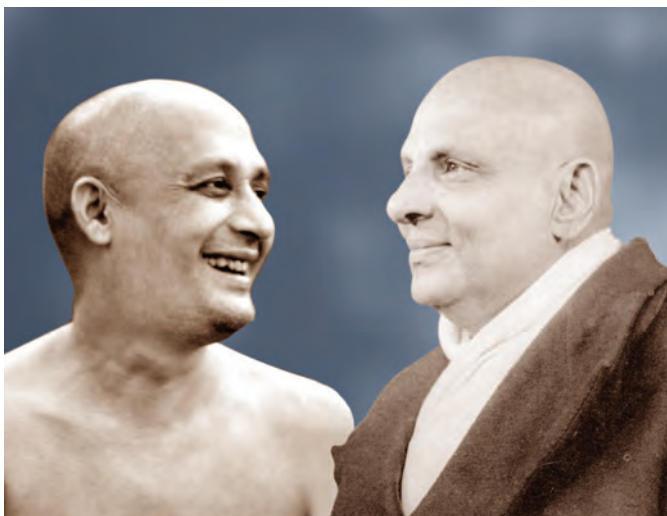
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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga
and to our guru Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati
who continues to inspire and guide us
on our spiritual journey.*

Swami Niranjan

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Preface

CONVERSATIONS ON THE SCIENCE OF YOGA

Conversations on the Science of Yoga is an encyclopaedic series which brings together the collected teachings of two generations of masters – Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh and Swami Satyananda Saraswati of Munger. Satsangs given by Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati on his numerous national and international tours also provide the answers to many questions on this vast subject. These luminaries represent a living tradition in which the eternal knowledge and wisdom of yoga has been passed from guru to disciple in a dynamic continuum from the early twentieth century to the first decades of the twenty-first century.

The series consists of sets of books which present the timeless culture of yoga topic by topic, in question and answer format. In this way, complex and profound subjects such as karma yoga, hatha yoga and bhakti yoga, are presented in clear, simple language. These conversations on yoga reflect an ancient and enduring approach to the transmission of wisdom, in which spiritual aspirants seek answers to their questions at the feet of the guru.

Many of the answers also include verses from the various relevant scriptures, connecting the modern experience with the classical tradition. It is through the lives and teachings of the masters that the scriptures are correctly and intuitively

interpreted for each generation, ensuring that the light of these revelations continues to illumine and inspire the hearts and minds of all who aspire for spiritual upliftment.

Conversations on the Science of Yoga has been compiled from the rich archive of satsangs and writings, both published and unpublished, which is held at the Bihar School of Yoga, Munger. The organization of this material into the major branches of yoga and related topics creates a unique interpretation of the classical yogic sciences for the benefit of humanity in the modern era. Deeply founded in tradition, the teachings are both systematic and practical, addressing the needs of individuals and society at a time when adjustment to constant change is placing unprecedented pressure on people all over the world.

The Bihar Yoga tradition

The Bihar School of Yoga is ideally placed to produce this major contribution to yogic literature. Founded in 1963 by Swami Satyananda Saraswati, the system known in India as Bihar Yoga and internationally as Satyananda Yoga, seamlessly integrates all facets of the yogic tradition, including the various branches of yoga, the philosophies which are fundamental to the yogic culture and the

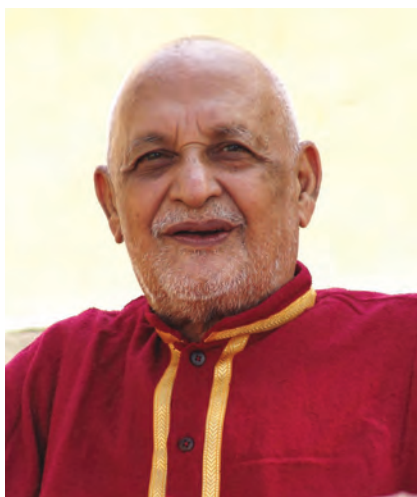


dynamism of self-realized preceptors which ensures that the teachings remain fresh and relevant in any age. This all-inclusive approach means that yogic practices are available as tools for holistic life management, while other *vidyas*, spiritual sciences, such as Tantra, Vedanta and Samkhya provide a broad philosophical base. Emerging from this living tradition, *Conversations on the Science of Yoga* is a unique and precious offering to humanity.



Swami Sivananda Saraswati (1887–1963)

Swami Sivananda was a towering spiritual force in the yogic renaissance which developed in India in the first half of the twentieth century. After serving as a doctor in Malaya, he returned to India to pursue his spiritual aspirations, and in 1924 was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa in Rishikesh. He founded the Divine Life Society, toured India extensively, wrote hundreds of books and inspired thousands around the world to practise yoga and lead a divine life. Swami Sivananda's eightfold path of yoga – serve, love, give, purify, do good, be good, meditate, realize – expresses his philosophy of service to humanity and continues to guide the work of the Bihar School of Yoga.



Swami Satyananda Saraswati (1923–2009)

Swami Satyananda was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa by his guru Swami Sivananda, in 1947. After serving his guru's mission in Rishikesh for twelve years, he founded the International Yoga Fellowship in 1956 and the Bihar School of Yoga in 1963. From that base he took the teachings to the rest of the world, fulfilling the mandate of his guru to 'spread yoga from door to door and shore to shore.'

Through his genius and compassion, many ancient, complex and esoteric practices were systematized, simplified and made available to people of all ages, cultures and creeds. Swami Satyananda's blend of charisma and pragmatism attracted multitudes of devotees wherever he went, giving rise to a global movement and creating a far-reaching network of ashrams, yoga centres and teachers. Meanwhile, the headquarters in Bihar continued to expand its many programs, including the publishing division, producing numerous books that both preserve and disseminate the incredibly rich seam of practical wisdom which flows through this lineage.

In 1988 Swami Satyananda renounced his mission in order to live as a paramahansa sannyasin, performing higher

spiritual and vedic sadhanas in an isolated location. During this chapter of his life, he also realized his guru's teaching of 'serve, love, give', by establishing Sivananda Math, an organization dedicated to raising the living standards of the weaker and underprivileged sectors of society.

At midnight on 5 December 2009, Sri Swami Satyananda Saraswati attained mahasamadhi.



Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati (1960)

A yogi from earliest childhood, Swami Niranjanananda joined the Bihar School of Yoga in 1964 and was initiated into Dashnami sannyasa in 1971. At the age of eleven he was sent to live abroad by his guru Swami Satyananda, giving him direct experience and understanding of people from a vast array of cultures and walks of life. These years instilled in him a rare, cross-cultural insight into human nature, enabling him to communicate and interact with the international community with familiarity, ease and humour.

Combined with his depth of spiritual and yogic knowledge, this background equipped Swami Niranjanananda to guide the Bihar School of Yoga and the international yoga movement from 1983 until 2008, when he began handing

over the administration to the next generation. During this time he also authored many classic books on yoga, tantra and the Upanishads and founded Bihar Yoga Bharati, the world's first yoga university, while continuing extensive national and international touring.

Following retirement from his role at the Bihar School of Yoga, Swami Niranjanananda established Sannyasa Peeth for the development and training of sannyasins, and for his own pursuit of the higher sadhanas of sannyasa.

As the spiritual successor to Swami Satyananda, Swami Niranjanananda continues to inspire aspirants around the world.



Yoga is not a philosophy, it is a practical science. Philosophy gives you knowledge, yoga gives you experience. This is the beauty of yoga. That experience is a manifestation of your inner being.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Introduction

Behind every sick man, there is a spiritual man. Behind a diabetic, there is a yogi. Behind a man suffering from depression, there is an aspirant. When a patient comes for help one should teach him yoga and make him better. Of course his sickness should be treated, but one should not stop there. One should take that person further into the spiritual domain of life.

—*Swami Satyananda*

Hatha yoga is recognized around the world as a unique system for promoting the health and wellbeing of body and mind. The practices of hatha yoga are a health kit for the prevention, management and cure of a vast range of illnesses and health conditions. Every yoga teacher knows the power of hatha yoga to heal. They know it not only from their personal experience, but from the experience of a multitude of students who report the disappearance of chronic conditions which have plagued them for years; who report the absence of pain which they had thought was a life sentence; who report freedom from anxiety and depressions which psychiatrists could not cure. As scientific research into yoga for health management continues, the anecdotes are increasingly supported by evidence-based studies. The yogic renaissance of the twentieth century brought hatha yoga into society as never before. As acceptance of yoga grows, the

possibility of relief from the suffering of ill health through simple practices of hatha yoga is steadily increasing.

The contribution of the Bihar School of Yoga in this sphere has its foundations in Swami Sivananda, who was a doctor and a deeply compassionate man. He promoted the health-giving properties of hatha yoga as fundamental for spiritual aspirants and householders alike. In his characteristically direct manner, he wrote, “Attain good health! Without health, how can you live? Without health, how can you earn? Without health, how can you succeed in yoga or any undertaking? Possess wonderful health through the practice of hatha yoga.” He regarded strength of body and mind as essential for achievement in life, whether material or spiritual, and presented hatha yoga, including its lifestyle recommendations, as the foundation for attaining and maintaining optimum health.

Swami Satyananda took the application of hatha yoga for health to the next logical stage by pursuing medical research into the therapeutic value of the practices. This work started in the 1960s with research into the effects of yoga on heart disease, funded and fully supported by the Indian government. Later, the Yoga Research Foundation was established, enabling the Bihar School of Yoga to conduct its own studies, most notably on the application of yoga for asthma, diabetes and hypertension. Simultaneously, sannyasins and doctors around the world began independent research into the effects of yoga on a wide range of physical and mental disorders. This work is ongoing and has played an important role in the recognition of yoga by mainstream health practitioners, particularly for management of stress-related conditions, respiratory disorders and back care.

The prana principle

The underlying principle of hatha yoga is the need to balance and manage the flows of *prana*, the subtle energy, in the body. The concept of prana is vital to the yogic theory of health and disease, which views pranic imbalance and

blockage as a fundamental cause of disease. In defining disease, Swami Satyananda says, “What is a disease? There may be many definitions, however the yogic definition says that disease is nothing but an imbalance in the energy distribution in the body.” Pranic deficiency and imbalance is seen as the starting point for disease states, as poor pranic flow weakens the affected body part, eventually resulting in susceptibility to disease. Physical and mental tensions contribute to pranic blockage, as do poor lifestyle and breathing habits. Hatha yoga includes practices and recommendations to remedy all of these factors. Shatkarmas and asanas remove physical and mental tensions and blockages, pranayama enhances relaxation and corrects the breathing pattern, mudra and bandha conserve and redirect prana, while living a healthy, natural lifestyle purifies and strengthens the physical and pranic bodies.

Medical science, however, is based on physical and psychological diagnosis and has not yet recognized the role of prana, as it cannot be perceived and measured scientifically. The medical understanding of hatha yoga’s effectiveness in health management is limited by this paradigm. In the light of this, it is essential that yoga teachers have a sound understanding of the pranic structure and the effect of the various practices on it.

Purification by internal cleansing

Purification of the body is an aim of hatha yoga and is a fundamental aspect of optimizing health through hatha yoga. At the grossest level this is done by practising the shatkarmas, the original practices of hatha yoga, which are internal cleansing techniques. The majority of the shatkarmas are for cleansing the respiratory, digestive and excretory systems – that is, the systems directly concerned with the body’s physical input and output.

Traditionally they have been complex processes requiring considerable training and preparation. To make these valuable techniques available, Swami Satyananda adapted

and simplified a selection so that virtually anyone can practise them with guidance from a yoga teacher.

The most commonly used are *jala neti*, cleansing the nasal passages with saline water; *kunjaj*, cleansing the oesophagus and stomach by regurgitating saline water; and *shankhaprakshalana*, cleansing the entire alimentary canal by drinking saline water and performing a series of asanas. These practices alone deal with many common ailments: neti treats and prevents allergies and respiratory infections and also benefits the ears and eyes; kunjaj treats and prevents indigestion and asthma; shankhaprakshalana treats and prevents constipation and a wide range of digestive disorders.

The shatkarmas also have more subtle effects, influencing the pranic body and the mind. As well as flushing out the internal systems, they raise one's energy and bring lightness and release of tension at the mental level.

Holistic health care

Hatha yoga is perhaps the most comprehensive single system for holistic health care. All the body's systems are thoroughly taken care of. For example, while many health and fitness programs exist for keeping the musculoskeletal and cardiac systems strong and healthy, only asanas take the body through its entire range of movement. In the process, the body's energy reserves are increased, not depleted, and the nervous system and endocrine systems, which are relatively inaccessible, are directly benefited. Additionally, the digestive, excretory, reproductive, respiratory and circulatory systems also benefit.

One reason for the powerful effect of asanas on the nervous and endocrine systems is the correlation between major glands, nerve plexuses and the yogic *chakras*, or energy centres. The asanas are intended to strengthen and awaken the energy of the chakras. To this end they create pressure to stimulate the chakra whilst also removing tensions that block the pranic flow to the region. An incidental effect is

the activation of the associated glands and nerve plexus. For instance, asanas that influence manipura chakra in the spine behind the navel, also stimulate the adrenal glands and the solar plexus.

The extensive yogic understanding of breath and its manipulation is expressed through the hatha yoga pranayamas, a unique set of breathing techniques with many therapeutic applications. While the effect of breathing practices on the respiratory and circulatory systems is to be expected, it is through pranayama that hatha yoga most directly works on the nervous system. The implications of this for mental health are perhaps unparalleled, as intractable anxiety conditions, which indicate imbalance in the nervous system, can be managed and even cured with consistent practice of pranayama. Depression can also be lifted by regular and sustained practice of specific pranayamas.

Yoga as therapy

According to Swami Niranjan, “Yoga is a process of finding a balance; it is not therapy.” This is an important distinction to make, as it reflects the true nature of yoga rather than the deconstructionist perspective which yoga therapy tends towards. Swami Niranjan’s yogic definition of health steers one away from the conditioned idea of therapy: “Yoga does not say that one should never suffer from any kind of disease: rather, yoga says there will be suffering, as that is the natural law, but if the disease can be managed, that management is health.” These statements are a reminder of the big picture of both yoga and health.

The value of hatha yoga practices in health management comes from their balancing effect on the body, prana and mind. This means that while many medical remedies have unwanted side effects, the healing effect of yoga is actually a positive side effect of the balance and harmony it creates in the overall physical system. This is why, after attending classes for some time, students may notice that they no longer have regular migraine, or their carpal

tunnel syndrome has simply vanished, or they no longer have insomnia. Their practice was general, not specifically targeting their problem, yet the problem went away.

Hatha yoga can be applied in a therapeutic manner, but even then, the yogic prescription needs to ensure that balance is restored holistically. If the focus is purely on the diseased condition, a new imbalance could arise. This happens by ‘overdosing’ on a particular practice to the point where the energy imbalance is overcompensated for and new disturbances arise. This danger particularly exists when the yoga teacher or practitioner does not understand the pranic effect of yoga.

Hatha yoga in society

Hatha Yoga and Health is the final content volume of the *Conversations* hatha yoga series. Within the tradition of yogic literature, it is customary for the conclusion to describe the author’s recommended practices for and experiences of samadhi, the enlightened state. The concept of samadhi in hatha yoga was discussed in *Hatha Yoga Book 2: Hatha Yoga and the Mind*, the material being chiefly drawn from commentaries on classical texts.

Samadhi is not the aim of hatha yoga in society. The mission of the Bihar School of Yoga lineage has been to take yoga “from door to door and from shore to shore” for the benefit of individuals and society in the modern era. The aim of taking yoga into society is to give people the means to expand their consciousness and optimize their energy so that they may live positively, peacefully, joyfully and intelligently.

Good health is needed for effectiveness in life, as well as providing a strong foundation for spiritual development. This is in keeping with the classical tradition, in which hatha yoga is viewed as a preparation for raja yoga. Therefore, the concluding volumes of this series, *Book 7* on health and *Book 8* on sadhana, describe and give practices for the expansion of hatha yoga into a system which supports the quest of humanity for physical, mental and spiritual health in the modern era.

1

Understanding Health and Disease

WHAT IS HEALTH?

What is health?

Swami Sivananda: Health is the state of equilibrium between the three humours of the body – *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*: wind, bile and phlegm – wherein the mind and the organs of the body work in harmony, one enjoys peace and happiness, and performs life's duties with comfort and ease.

Health is that condition in which one has good digestion, good appetite, normal breathing and pulse, good quantity and quality of blood, strong nerves and a calm mind. A sound mind in a sound body, free movement of the bowels, a normal state of urine, rosy cheeks, a shining face and sparkling eyes are signs of good health.

Health is a state in which one sleeps well, is at ease, free from any kind of dis-ease or uneasiness. The pulse rate of respiration is in perfect order and the bodily temperature is normal. When one is in a state of perfect health, the heart, lungs, brain, kidneys, liver and intestines all work in perfect concord and discharge their functions satisfactorily. This state is coveted by all.

Health is a state in which one jumps, sings, smiles, laughs, whistles and moves hither and thither with joy and ecstasy. It is that condition in which one can think properly,

speak properly and act with alacrity, nimbleness and vigilance. A life with good health is a blessing indeed.

What state of health does hatha yoga aim to establish?

Swami Satyananda: Health is the fundamental aim of hatha yoga. Disease is identified as an obstacle to progress in yoga in the *Yoga Sutras* (1:30).

In a general sense, health can be defined as a combination of the following: resistance to infection, absence of disease, both mental and physical endurance, flexibility of mind and body, mental peace, perfect coordination and condition of all organs, muscles and nerves in the body and their control by the brain and spinal nerve centres, together with a perfectly functioning pranic body. Hatha yoga aims to bring about this state of health.

What is the yogic view of health and disease?

Swami Niranjanananda: Yoga says that health is not the absence of disease but the proper management of diseased conditions. It is impossible to imagine a person who is totally free from illness: one has a body, and that body is influenced by climate, environment and diet. The body is influenced by so many factors, including genetics, that no one can be totally and absolutely free from disease.

There are four aspects of life which are unchangeable: birth, disease, old age and death. When one is born into this life, one has it, whether one likes it or not. In the process of life, between birth and death, disease and old age cannot be avoided. Each individual has taken birth and will suffer from disease. Once this body is adopted, it is bound to have disease at some point. Old age is going to be experienced, and death is a reality that cannot be avoided. Yet everyone tries to discover a method to avoid these aspects which are the basis of life.

Yoga does not say that one should never suffer from any kind of disease: rather, yoga says there will be suffering, as that is the natural law, but if the disease can be managed,

that management is health. In the yogic view, health and wellbeing mean adjustment to the prevailing conditions in life, not the absence of disease. According to yogic principles, health is based on common sense. Health is based on how efficiently and effectively the body is used to perform its various functions, without sliding into levels imbalance which cause illness. Health is not the absence of disease, but the proper management of disease. That is the theory of yoga.

From the yogic perspective, therefore, physical health is the management of various physiological conditions that arise, whether in the form of a simple ailment or a life-threatening disease. The aim of yoga in health is not eradication or curing of the problem, but the management of these conditions. After all, the body is subject to changing conditions, changing health patterns and a changing environment; it will react to these changes either positively or negatively.

If the body reacts in a positive way to a change in diet or environment, such as pollution, then one says, “I have a strong immune system and nothing affects me. I feel healthy, I feel strong, I feel happy.” But if it responds in a negative way, one starts having breathing problems, cardiac problems and other symptoms that are recognized as disease.

The yogic aim is to convert the negative responses of the body into positive ones. Therefore, it is not the treatment or the curing or the eradication of disease that indicates health, but proper management of the physiological conditions. One may suffer from a life-threatening disease, but if one is able to manage it properly, perhaps it can be overcome.

This theory is being experimented with by professionals all over the world and also by many people who suffer from chronic illness. There are a large range of yoga practices which give one the ability to function optimally in life.

What is the yogic concept of health?

Swami Niranjanananda: The concept of health in yoga is to realize the natural stamina, strength and ability of the body,

mind and emotions. The closer one is to one's natural self, the less problems there are with illness or disease. Most illnesses and diseases are caused by imbalance in the system: malfunction of organs, imbalance in the nervous or hormonal system, imbalance in the emotional structure. If the problem of disease can be overcome by correcting an imbalance, it is more effective and beneficial for physical health.

Those who have a consistent and regular yoga practice do not fall sick easily. Of course, it is natural to have runny noses and stomachs, and maybe dysentery or constipation sometimes, but that is the extent of illness in yoga practitioners. If one simply lives a balanced lifestyle and remains at ease with oneself, there is definitely no place for disease; that is the concept of yogic health.

What is optimum health?

Swami Niranjanananda: The experience of optimum health is a transcendental experience, where there are no limitations, where there is no experience of any stressful situations, and where there is a free flow and full awakening of an individual's energy. Precisely in this light, many scientific experiments have been conducted to see how the practices of asana and pranayama influence the structure of the body and mind.

Yoga says that when there is harmony or tension at the physical level, this is felt by the mind. Conversely, when there is mental tension, it is felt in the body. In the same way when there is harmony, equilibrium and a feeling of optimum health in the body, it is experienced in the brain and in the mind. This state eventually influences the dormant areas of the mind, thus awakening the potential that is inherent within them. This is the concept of total health.

How does the yogic definition of disease influence the yogic prescription?

Swami Satyananda: Yoga has a beneficial effect on most disease states; but first, disease has to be defined properly.

Yoga has its own definition. Disease manifests in the body but does not originate in the body; disease originates from a state of imbalance. There may be disharmony between the nervous systems or an imbalance in the hormonal secretions, or in the digestive processes. As such, disease is defined in a subtle manner, and treated according to its nature.

For example, yoga does not treat diabetes as a digestive disorder. It is known to be a deficiency in insulin, there is no doubt about it. It is also known that the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems are controlled by higher centres, and when these centres fail to activate the nervous system properly, a deficiency of hormones in a particular area results. When yoga treats a diabetic patient it is not a treatment for a deficiency of insulin; he is not treated for the disease he is apparently suffering from. Yoga recognizes that it is stress and strain that are responsible, so the treatment is for that.

When a mental health patient suffering from psychosis, neurosis or a nervous breakdown is treated, yoga takes him as a personality, a human being, an individual who can think and feel. Yoga takes him deeper into his own mind through the practices of concentration and meditation, bringing him to the root of his illness.

If a person is suffering from high anxiety, the prescription is not for practices that induce an immediate state of tranquillity. Rather, yoga tries to explode that person's personality, to express what remains dormant in the back of his mind. This is possible with the practice of concentration, such as on a mantra, which is part of yoga. As a scientific principle, mantra is a powerful instrument. Through the practice of mantra, one tries to explode the deeper phases of the consciousness. When the inner states of mind are exploded then one comes face to face with all the thoughts, distractions, passions and repressions that lie deep within.

The physical body is influenced by the human mind. It is the sentiments, the emotions, feelings and objectives, passions, fears, anxieties and worries in the mind which

create physiological changes in the body. The adrenal, thyroid and pituitary secretions have a natural flow and order. A thought can and does influence the working of the physical body. Fear, psychosis or anxiety influence the endocrine glands and change the mode of brainwaves.

What is meant by ‘balance’ in the yogic understanding of health and disease?

Swami Satyananda: Caduceus is a symbol of health, meaning the balance of *ida* and *pingala nadis*, the flows of mental and physical energy in the human body. The symbol of caduceus, which has two serpents intertwined around a staff, is often used as a symbol in the medical profession. The adoption of this symbol is perfectly logical. Medicine is concerned with balance, for it is imbalance that causes disease.

Balance means good health while imbalance implies illness or bad health. This balance or lack of balance applies at all levels of subtlety; it is directly associated with *ida* and *pingala*. Illness can be caused by physical, pranic and mental imbalance. In a wider sense, illness is caused by spiritual imbalance. In the extreme sense, it can be said that only a person who has achieved the highest stage of spiritual life is truly healthy. The balance of *ida* and *pingala* is the prime concern of any system of healing, including medicine, which is why the caduceus is used as the symbol of medical science.



Caduceus

What is the basis of health?

Swami Niranjanananda: The World Health Organisation has defined health as physical, mental, spiritual, moral, emotional and social: that is, when there is harmony at all levels, there is the experience of health. The World Health Organisation has not defined health as the absence of disease from the body. It has defined health as a regulated

lifestyle, it has defined health as harmony between the body, emotions, mind, spiritual qualities, morality, social living and character. Everything is involved in that.

The word in Hindi for health is *swaasthya*. *Swa* means one's own, *astha* means one who is established in something, or the state of being established in something. One who is established in body, one who is established in mind, one who is aware of the body, one who is aware of the mind, is *swaasthya*. This idea of *swaasthya*, health, is contained in the yogic tradition. When one is established in one's nature it is *swaroope avasthanam*. When one is established in one's own self, health is experienced. This is a literal definition of *swaasthya* and it is this literal definition that yoga has followed. The concept of *swaasthya* or health is not only physical, it is also psychological, it is not only psychological, is also spiritual, as the spiritual dimension of life is the root of one's existence.

If one looks at a tree above the ground, the trunk, branches, leaves, flowers and fruit are seen. If one wants to sustain the tree, what does one do? Look at the trunk, the branches, the leaves, the flowers and the fruits, or take care of the roots? If one takes care of the roots of the tree, that tree becomes strong. If the roots of the tree are ignored, no matter how big the tree is, how ancient the tree is, in one tempest, in one storm, it will come down. If this example is applied to oneself, it will be discovered that the roots have been ignored and the upper part of the tree, the body, the senses, the mind, the intellect and the ego, have been identified with.

When the roots are ignored, there is a lack of willpower, a lack of mental clarity, a lack of understanding the situation or people or environment, and one's own self-oriented perceptions become more dominant in life for personal gain and pleasure. This does not allow one to contribute substantially and positively to the development of human society and civilization as one family. This is why yoga practice begins with developing awareness of the roots: that

is the theory of yoga. It is for this reason that the concept of *atma*, the spirit, comes into yoga.

What is meant by ‘health’ in the different dimensions of being?

Swami Niranjanananda: When one talks of health, one does not mean the health of the body’s muscular system. When one talks of health, one does not mean the alleviation of physiological problems. When one talks about health, one means harmony, balance and equilibrium at each and every level of the personality, in each and every dimension of the personality.

When this experience is attained, the state of true and complete relaxation is attained. The sensory perceptions become introverted. In this state of relaxation, awareness of the worldly sense objects, objectified external awareness, also becomes introverted. Everyone is aware of the external experiences, but no one is aware of the internal experiences.

The aim of yoga is to make one aware of internal experiences; it is to make one aware of both realities, external and internal, which in turn helps one to transcend or understand one’s own capacities, limitations and potentials. Therefore, yoga is considered to be a science of the body, of the mind and of the spirit; it is a science for the total health of the whole of one’s being.

Why is yoga needed for health in the modern world?

Swami Satyananda: All over the world people are living in a state of terror, fright, anxiety, passion, tension, insecurity, uncertainty and suspicion. These states influence one’s physiological structure, and cause many of the diseases that people suffer from today. In this context yoga comes as a great panacea. When yoga is practised, the changes in the physical body are clear: the behaviour of the heart, the consumption of oxygen, the rate of respiration, the reactions of the nervous system, the secretion of hormones, the alteration of brainwaves; all the systems of the physical body are influenced and undergo certain changes.

CAUSES OF DISEASE

According to yoga, what is the cause of disease?

Swami Niranjanananda: There is only one real cause which combines every cause, and that is imbalance. Whether it is ecological or pertaining to lifestyle, diet, mind or thinking pattern, the main problem is imbalance.

Physical imbalance is the cause of postural defects, stooping shoulders and other kinds of physiological ailments and diseases. Stomach problems come from dietary imbalance. Mental imbalance arises from conflict and emotional tension. For example, in a family where the husband desires something and the wife wants something else there is conflict; eventually this can result in diseases like hypertension, diabetes and cardiac problems. Suppressed desire or ambition can lead to asthma.

There is also spiritual imbalance, when the mind is too extroverted, seeking pleasure, satisfaction and peace outside. This leads to mental dissipation, *ashanti*, loss of mental faculties and inner balance. There is ecological imbalance, which gives birth to many kinds of illnesses and diseases. So the one word to define disease is 'imbalance'.

Yoga has never viewed any illness or disease as something purely physiological or psychological. It has always viewed illness in the context of the whole human personality.

What are the causes of disease?

Swami Niranjanananda: Diseases can be divided into three groups: psychosomatic, somatopsychic and those caused by factors in the environment.

According to yoga, eighty percent of physical diseases originate from the mind, the remainder being due to microorganisms or external impurities entering the body. Diseases originating from the mind are called psychosomatic diseases. Psychosomatic diseases are related to disturbances in the mind, such as anger, jealousy and hatred. These influence

the body and its internal activities. According to this principle, when the mind is peaceful and stable, when it is restful and no longer excited, when internal tension and affliction are absent, then there is also an effect on the body. The body starts automatically becoming controlled and balanced.

Diseases originating from the body and then influencing the mind are called somatopsychic diseases. Somatopsychic diseases are due to disruption or blockage in the flow of prana.

The third group originate from the environment: malaria, cholera and diseases caused by microorganisms attacking the body, as well as pollution, and irregular and uncontrolled food intake.

Yoga recognizes these three most common causes of disease. There are also many other minor causes and ailments which can be managed with yogic techniques.

What is the role of hatha yoga in maintaining health?

Swami Niranjanananda: Tension is necessary in life, as without tension, there is no motivation and no action. One must know when this tension becomes distress in life; everyone faces distresses, imbalances and difficulties. To deal with this, yoga begins with regulation of the body's functions so that there are no imbalances in the body systems leading to high level distress which later becomes a disease.

Disease is the disturbed state of the body, and this disturbed condition can easily be rectified as the body contains within it not only the possibility of damaging itself through irregular life patterns and habits, but also the ability to repair and improve itself through regulated life patterns and habits. This is why, when one is moving towards disease one's peace is disturbed: that is a clear indication that there are certain irregularities in lifestyle which need to be observed. When those irregularities are able to be managed, the ease returns.

This is the concept of hatha yoga: regulate life in such a way, through exercises, through respiration, through other

practices, that there is total physical harmony and all those problems which afflict and influence the performance of the senses and body can be eradicated. The purpose of hatha yoga is *sharir shuddhi*: purification, detoxification, and regularization. These result in harmonization of the body and its internal organs, and health is attained.

How does the body create its own states of disease?

Swami Niranjanananda: Please remember that health is not the absence of disease from life or body. What is the meaning or definition of health? Health does not mean that illnesses or diseases are absent; that is not possible. It is everyone's experience that from the moment of birth one's life, one's body, one's mind, is subject to change. Remember that when changes happen, an imbalance will always be created until adjustment is made to that state of living. In the initial stages of that imbalance, the body undergoes the changes and these changes can lead to illness.

For example, at certain ages, there are hormonal changes in the body. When the hormonal changes in the body happen in the life of a young person, in the life of an adult, in the life of a female, and in the life of a male, they can cause havoc in the body and mind. These hormonal changes are more frequent in one's younger years, as the body grows through its own internal changes. Therefore, young people are more prone to illnesses, adults less, and elderly more, as immunity is low when one is young, develops when one becomes an adult, and again goes down as one ages. This immunity is the reflection of the physical changes that take place naturally, unconsciously, spontaneously in the body.

Vyadhi, disease, is a natural outcome of life. Old age is also a natural outcome of life. Between life and death, one goes through these two changes: disease and old age. There cannot be one hundred percent eradication of disease. Therefore health does not denote that the body is absolutely one hundred percent free from illnesses; rather, health

denotes that there is an awareness of how to manage different problems as and when they arise at different times in life.

How can disease be avoided?

Swami Niranjanananda: When one buys a car, there is a manual stating when the car needs to be serviced and what type of service is required. If the car is not serviced at the right time it will deteriorate and the life of the car will be reduced. Sometimes the brakes fail, sometimes the gears jam, sometimes the oil burns dry. Similar conditions are experienced in the physical body due to misuse. One's body is like a car, but no one takes it to be serviced. As a result, various problems occur, which are known as disease.

People tend to ignore the imbalances that occur because they are unable to see where the fault lies. The final outcome is chronic illness. If the little imbalances can be managed when they arise, chronic situations can be avoided. Yoga teaches one to recognize the state of the body and learn how to become friends with the body. If the body is misused and abused, there will be infirmity and stress, and eventually a major problem will arise.

According to yoga, what are the physical causes of imbalance and disease?

Swami Niranjanananda: According to yoga, the physical causes of imbalance and disease are:

1. Biological agents which include:
 - a) Viruses, bacteria, infections, etc., all of which are micro-organisms
 - b) Internal and external parasites
 - c) Organisms such as snakes, scorpions, insects and mosquitoes.
2. Climatic and environmental factors such as:
 - a) Extremes in temperature, altitudes, etc.
 - b) Pollution of air, water, soil, etc.
 - c) Contamination or adulteration of food, or food which has artificial additives.

3. Trauma, such as accidents and chronic postural trauma, e.g. sitting badly
4. Abuse, addiction and medication: the intake of chemicals and toxins which are harmful to the body
5. Nutritional imbalance
6. Genetic traits and defects
7. Ageing process.

These are the seven major points, all of which create physical imbalance. Apart from these there are many other minor points such as immunological reactions, disturbances in cellular functions and so on.

What are the mental causes of imbalance and disease according to yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: The mental causes of imbalance and disease are as follows:

1. Unresolved conflicts which have taken the form of fear, anxiety, worry or tension, and which have become some kind of complex or inhibition.
2. Emotional reactions such as elation, sadness, anger, hatred, jealousy or other mood swings, according to different situations.
3. Ego-related problems such as:
 - a) Creation of false ideas about oneself, others, diseases or situations
 - b) Non-acceptance of the present
 - c) Self-identification with pain and pleasure, success and failure.
4. Psychosomatic/psycho-sexual problems, including stress, which are created due to some kind of suppression or over-indulgence.
5. Psychiatric disorders such as hallucination, mania, depression, paranoia, schizophrenia, sociopathic tendencies.
6. Low IQ, indecisiveness, confusion, lack of creativity, dullness in understanding.
7. Reacting either too emotionally or too intellectually to a life situation.

What are the pranic causes of imbalance and disease?

Swami Niranjanananda: The pranic causes of imbalance and disease are:

1. Disturbance of the entire pranic system, where the energy is either:
 - a) Too high, resulting in hyperactivity, restlessness and over sexuality, or
 - b) Too low, resulting in lack of vitality, lethargy and susceptibility to disease.
2. Imbalance of the ida and pingala flows, causing:
 - a) Temperature variation, either hot or cold
 - b) Mind/body incoherence
 - c) Mental/physical growth retardation
 - d) Introversion or extroversion
 - e) Concentration, memory or sleep problems.
3. Blocks in the pranic flow to a particular organ or part, producing a physical disease in that part, such as hormonal imbalance, epilepsy, neuromuscular traumas, organ failure.
4. Sushumna blockage, which prevents further evolution.

One kind of pranic imbalance is the overall blockage in the flow of prana which manifests either as hypernervous or hyponervous activity. Here the corresponding emotions and reactions of anxiety, depression, anger and frustration are experienced.

Why does pranic blockage or imbalance lead to disease?

Swami Satyananda: When one talks with the help of a microphone, the microphone is entirely dependent on the energy that is being supplied. If that energy is cut off, the microphone is of no use; the right flow of energy must be maintained. If the energy supply is too much or too little, it will not work. In the same way, the energy in the physical body has a certain voltage and frequency, and when this frequency and its velocity and voltage are upset, one becomes sick.

When the energy level is imbalanced, one falls sick. The sickness does not begin with the simple nervous system, the

sickness does not begin with indigestion and diarrhoea and colitis in the stomach. The sickness begins with the disturbance of inner and outer emotion; such disturbance suppresses, depletes and dissipates the energy flows in the body.

Hatha yoga texts talk about 130,000 nadis out of which 72,000 nadis merge in the heart. That means 72,000 nadis carry energy forces to and from the heart; if something happens to the heart it means that the supply system feeding this energy into the heart twenty-four hours a day is obstructed somewhere, and has to be repaired. Medicines may control such a disease, but the energy supply must be repaired to make one better.

How does imbalance in ida and pingala affect health?

Swami Niranjanananda: One kind of pranic disturbance is ida and pingala imbalance. Ida-pingala imbalance has been described as continuous mental or physical activity which cannot be stopped. Everyone encounters such situations at different times in their lives.

For example, with ida imbalance the mind goes into overdrive and many, many ideas and thoughts begin to arise. This happens especially at night when there are no distractions and one is more aware of the mental process. This overdrive of the mind deprives one of sleep, as there is a fast, continuous mental process going on.

Pingala imbalance is similar except that there is physical, not mental, hyperactivity. Even after a long day of hard physical work, there will be an excess of physical energy. There can also be a blockage in sushumna, which stops the further evolution of consciousness.

How can pranic imbalance be differentiated from physical or mental imbalances?

Swami Niranjanananda: It can be difficult to differentiate between the effect of pranic activity and the corresponding physical, mental or emotional activity. One may think it is pranic, when it is actually a mental state affecting the pranic

level. Or when it seems that an imbalance is mental, it is the pranic state affecting the mind. There is a hairline difference which can only be observed through increased sensitivity to prana. Until one experiences the flow of prana and becomes aware of the pranic blockages, it is not possible to distinguish between pranic imbalance and physical, mental or emotional imbalance.

Pranic imbalance is a relatively new concept in this modern age, as life has been geared towards viewing health from the physical or mental perspectives; the pranic structure is not usually understood by the normal modern mind. Yogis, however, have attributed the cause of most of the mental, emotional or physical imbalances as originating in the pranic body or structure. This is where the basic understanding between science and yoga differ concerning the human body.

Yoga sees everything from the pranic perspective and science sees everything from the physical and mental perspective. The pranic perspective is seen or felt more in terms of the vibrations that are received from other people, places or things, or that one projects. One gets a vibration from somebody and either likes or dislikes it. This vibration theory is the first step towards understanding pranic imbalance. In anger, for example, a powerful vibration emanates from the personality, like a rush of energy. In depression or fear, there is a reversal of this rush. Instead of going out, the energy is withdrawn deep within.

In the pranic dimension, ida, pingala, and sushumna nadis are not just concepts but actual experiences. Without that actual experience, it is not possible to understand pranic imbalance analytically or intellectually. There is no way to express, define or understand prana theoretically. Through practice certain people develop energy spasms or energy flows in different parts of the body. However, yoga says that in order to understand the pranic structure, it is necessary to perfect the techniques of prana vidya.

What is mal?

Swami Niranjanananda: *Mal* means an environment or condition which is incompatible with the growth and development of human life. When one lives in that environment for a long time, then mal becomes the cause of a disease. Miners who work in coal mines hundreds of metres underground continuously inhale different kinds of gases and coal dust for eight hours every day. These people often suffer from tuberculosis, asthma and respiratory problems due to the detrimental environment affecting their body.

There are people who drink impure water containing thousands of bacteria known and unknown to science. There are water-borne diseases which affect the digestive system, pancreas, liver and kidneys. There are air-borne diseases affecting the lungs. There are chemical-borne diseases affecting the immune system. Scientists have recently found fifty new viruses which are carried by mosquitoes. They can kill, cause cerebral fever or carry other diseases, for which there is no antidote. All are classified as mal, impurity.

What is vikara?

Swami Niranjanananda: *Vikara* means toxins. Even in a healthy life, toxins accumulate in the body. Accumulated toxins are normally excreted in sweat, urine and faeces, but sometimes the excretion is less than the amount that has been taken in. The toxins then go into the blood and are absorbed by the body, for example, into the muscles. They also become part of the natural acids of the body, such as lactic acid.

One can be a healthy, dynamic person, but whenever there is a period of inactivity in one's life, the toxins and acids begin to build up in various joints, and if one stretches, there is stiffness. This stiffness can become pain and the pain can become arthritis. This pain in the joints or the build-up of acids and toxins in joints can deform the bones; it can make the bones brittle, as happens in osteoporosis.

What is vikshepa?

Swami Niranjanananda: *Vikshepa* refers to the mind which is disturbed, unbalanced and confused. *Vikshepa* always begins as worry or *chintan*, brooding over something. When *vikshepa* begins, it changes the state of mind. A dynamic mind can become lethargic, a clear mind can become confused, a positive mind can become negative. This change of the mental state affects the nervous system. When a dynamic mind becomes lethargic, it changes the whole physical system and increases the parasympathetic activity, thus lowering the normal vitality and immunity of the body.

Genetically everyone is born with one weaker organ. In some people the lungs may be weak, in some people the heart, in some the muscles, in some the bones, in others the liver or the kidneys. *Vikshepa* affects that particular weak organ. If the lungs are weak and one is passing through the state of *vikshepa*, then breathlessness will manifest. If the digestion is weak and one is going through *vikshepa*, diarrhoea and dysentery will manifest. If the liver is weak, liver-related problems manifest. If the joints are weak, pains may suddenly occur which one was not aware of before. *Vikshepa* will always attack the weakest organ of the body and the problem will start increasing from that point on.

How does yoga manage mal, vikara and vikshepa?

Swami Niranjanananda: Just as simple and dynamic asanas prepare the musculoskeletal system for the advanced therapeutic asanas, the internal organs need energizing and their stamina improving by the practice of *shatkarmas*, the six cleansing techniques. In hatha yoga, the *shatkarmas* aim at reducing the intensity of *mal*, *vikara* and *vikshepa*.

What happens when vikara and mal are reduced by practising yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: While preparing the body for advanced practices, a miracle happens. As one reduces

vikara and mal from one's personality and nature, many of the physical, psychosomatic or spiritual problems are automatically reduced. Disease and illness, whether physical, mental or spiritual, are generated when there is an accumulation of toxins. It is like saying, "Mosquitoes do not breed in flowing water; they only breed in stagnant water." If the energy is flowing and the body is pure, there is little chance for the roots of disease to go into the body and personality. This is why people often begin to feel better without using any major postures for therapy, but just with the practice of pawanmuktasana and shatkarmas.

It is the experience of many yoga teachers that about forty to fifty percent of problems, diseases and illnesses are helped with only the basic group of shatkarmas and pawanmuktasana. The people who are not helped by these basic practices are helped once they move on to advanced asanas. Therefore, the practise of basic yoga is always emphasized, rather than advanced yoga practices. Advanced yoga is taught when necessary, but the practice of pawanmuktasana is always recommended and emphasized.

If one can practise neti, kunjal, laghoo shankha-prakshalana and pawanmuktasana, up to forty to fifty percent of one's health will be regained. Whatever is not regained by this method will be regained with the help of advanced asanas, which directly affect the internal organs of the body.

What effect do negative emotions have on health?

Swami Sivananda: A fit of anger that lasts ten minutes takes away more energy than working at the plough for two days without food. Slow, gnawing jealousy eats away one's nerve power more rapidly than white ants eat through dry wood. Oversensitivity, impatience and worry bring on grey hairs scores of years earlier than they are due. Look within. Strive, exert. Give all the thoughts to the eradication of evil qualities. Anger will disappear. Jealousy will disappear. Eventually radiant health will be enjoyed.

Why do some people get diseases but not others?

Swami Niranjanananda: In the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali, stability and comfort are associated with the performance of yoga postures. They represent two different areas of influence that a posture has on the human personality: physical stability and mental ease. Physical stability and mental ease are by-products of performing a posture or *asana*. However, if this concept is taken beyond the practice of *asana*, it is discovered that the imbalances and tensions in the body do not allow the ease of the body to emerge. It is the same with the mind. The mind is in a state of continuous tension, dissipation and distraction. For the mind to become active, dynamic and creative, mental tranquillity, ease and comfort are needed. For this reason one tries to attain physical stability and mental ease, or comfort, through the practices of yoga.

Yoga is a process of finding a balance; it is not therapy. However, as the body plays a dominant role in life, the practices of yoga begin with the body. When distress in the body cannot be managed, that imbalance manifests and is experienced as a disease. When one is unable to manage stress, there is hypertension, insomnia, nervousness, sluggish digestion, slow circulation and inefficient respiration. Slowly, slowly, this imbalance begins to affect the weakest organ of the body, and it becomes diseased.

In the *Iliad*, the story is told of Achilles' heel, which was the weakest point in that warrior's body. Similarly, each person has a weak organ. In some people the weakness is in the digestive system, in others it is in the immune system and in some it is genetic. This weak organ is usually affected when one undergoes a lot of distress. Initially, the disease begins to manifest through that weak organ.

If twenty people are put in similar situations with similar levels of stress and tension, that stress and tension will manifest differently in those twenty different bodies. Some people will find that their digestion plays up; some will find that their blood pressure goes up; others will find that their breathing is affected and they become hyperactive and

unable to maintain their balance. Some will find that they cannot go to sleep and others will find that they become nervous. Although the stressful condition is the same for each participant, the actual manifestation of stress in the body will be different in each person. This shows that everyone has a weak area in the personality which needs to be balanced and harmonized.

BODY-MIND RELATIONSHIP

How powerful is the mind?

Swami Sivananda: Mind is the greatest force on this earth. He who has controlled his mind is full of powers. He can bring all minds under his influence. All diseases can be cured by psychic healing. One is struck with awe and wonder at the marvelous and mysterious powers of the mind of man. The source, or home, or support of this mysterious mind is God, or *atman*.

How do mental and emotional states affect health?

Swami Satyananda: My guru, Swami Sivananda, was a medical man. He used to say that the root cause of a man's disease is hidden in his philosophy of life. Unless he is ready to purify his body and his mind, and have faith in his own higher self, the long chain of diseases and misery never comes to an end. The medical cure of one disease does not prevent other diseases from arising. Even if the cure of the disease is feasible, liberation from grief and pain is impossible. A grief-free life does not necessarily mean an avidya-free life.

The sphere of disease is not confined to physical disease alone: mental torment, worry, ignorance, and instability of the mind are also diseases. Worry and grief are the root cause of disease and to be rid of these, various yoga practices such as mudras, bandhas, pranayama and yoga nidra can be used.

What do people want? To be cured completely or to walk the spiritual path? Yoga does them both: whether yoga does

or does not completely cure the disease, it does bless the patient with bliss.

How does mental strength give one a strong body?

Swami Sivananda: One must have a healthy state of mind in order to lead a happy and healthy life, and to progress on the spiritual path. Most physical ailments spring from a diseased state of mind. Kindly bear this fact in mind. Emotional imbalances lead to all sorts of nervous troubles and physical illnesses. That is why a real sannyasin, even if he is starved, homeless and friendless, is happy and full of vigour: he has inner strength.

How do the qualities of body and mind affect each other?

Swami Sivananda: Just as one relaxes the muscles after completing asanas and physical exercises, so too the mind needs to be relaxed and given rest after concentration and meditation, and after the practises of memory-training and the culturing of will.

The mind gathers experiences through the body and works in conjunction with the prana, senses and body. The mind has an influence over the body. If one is cheerful, the body will be healthy and strong. When one feels depressed, the body cannot work.

Just so, the body has influence over the mind. If the body is healthy and strong, the mind will be happy, cheerful and strong. If one has a stomach ache, the mind cannot function properly.

Thought takes the form of action and action reacts on the mind. The mind acts on the body and the body reacts to the mind. The mind is the subtle form of the physical body. The physical body is the outward manifestation of the mind. When the mind is rough, the body is rough.

What effect do thoughts have on physical health?

Swami Sivananda: The actions of the mind are indeed actions. The body is really one's thoughts, moods, convictions and

emotions objectified and made visible to the naked eye. It is a point worth noting with care that every cell in the body suffers or grows, receives a life impulse or a death impulse from every thought that enters the mind, for one tends to grow into the image of that which one thinks about most.

When the mind is turned to a particular thought and dwells on it, a definite vibration of matter is set up. The more often this vibration is caused, the more it tends to repeat itself to become a habit, to become automatic. The body follows the mind and imitates its changes. If the thoughts are concentrated, one's eyes become fixed. Every change in thought makes a vibration in the mental body and this, when transmitted to the physical body, causes activity in the nervous matter of the brain. This activity in the nervous cells causes many electrical and chemical changes in them. It is thought activity which causes these changes.

Bad thoughts are the primary cause of diseases afflicting the body. Whatever is held in the mind will be produced in the physical body. Any ill feeling or bitterness towards another person will at once affect the body and produce some kind of disease. Intense passions, long-standing bitter jealousy and corroding anxiety actually destroy the cells of the body and induce diseases of the heart, liver, kidneys, spleen and stomach. Violent fits of hot temper do serious damage to the brain cells, throw poisonous chemicals into the blood, produce general shock and depression and suppress the secretion of gastric juice, bile and other digestive juices in the alimentary canal, drain away energy, vitality, induce premature old age, and shorten life.

When the mind is agitated, the body is agitated. Wherever the body goes, the mind follows. When both the body and mind are agitated, the prana flows in the wrong direction. Instead of pervading the whole body steadily and equally, it vibrates at an unequal rate. Food is not digested properly and diseases originate. If the primary cause is removed, then all diseases disappear. The pains that afflict the physical body are secondary diseases, while

the vasantas and desires that affect the mind are termed mental or primary diseases. If bad thoughts are destroyed, bodily diseases vanish. Purity of mind means a healthy body. Therefore, one should be careful in one's thinking and in the selection of one's thoughts. Noble, sublime, loving and kind thoughts should be entertained at all times and a life of harmony, health and beauty will be enjoyed.

How does the interaction of body and mind affect health?

Swami Satyananda: This physical body is a mysterious combination of elements. Within the physical body there is nectar and there is poison, and every disease which originates within the body can be balanced and controlled within the body. The practices of asanas and pranayamas in particular, have an immediate effect on the body.

However, the most effective treatment is a synthesis of hatha yoga and raja yoga. Even if the cause is physiological, no disease can be only physiological, it becomes psychological as well. If one's physical body gets hurt, it is physiological. But when the body fails you, it becomes psychological. When it worries you, it is psychological. If it becomes septic, it becomes deeply psychological.

This is why even a wound is somatopsychic. In the same way, if one suffers from anxiety, it is psychological, it is emotional, yet the heart starts pumping, the stomach cramps begin, the body becomes sweaty, and sometimes it feels as if the whole head is reeling: anxiety is psychological, but its effects can be felt, and are seen in a tangible way.

Whenever something wrong happens to someone, it immediately injures or displaces the nervous system. As a result of imbalance in the nervous system, the brain, the hypothalamus and the cerebral motor cortex are also affected. Any problem can develop, from physical disorder to cancer. A thought is born out of the mind. An action is born out of mind. In the same way diseases which appear to be physical are also born out of the mind. Please understand this very well: whether it is headache, constipation, or

anything that is called a physical disease, it is never physical. The root cause of every disease is psychic and not somatic. The cause is always psychic but manifestation is somatic. If one can manage to go back to the mind, even a tumor can be dropped, and if one can influence one's own mind, a tumor can be created.

How does yoga view the fear associated with disease?

Swami Niranjanananda: In yoga, healing begins through the mind. There is one disease that medical science has not yet recognized, and which is an area of concern in yoga. It is known as DIFS – Disease Induced Fear Syndrome. If a lump appears on your hand, fear says, “I hope it is not cancer. I should have it tested.” If the doctor says it is malignant, there is a strange feeling of happiness that the fears have come true. If the doctor says it is benign, one may not believe it and have more tests just to be doubly sure. Fear creates disease in the body. A simple pimple can become malignant due to fear. Advanced cancer can be eradicated completely once fear has been eliminated from the mind. This has been the experience in the ashrams.

Cancer, HIV/AIDS, hypertension, arthritis, digestive problems, diabetes and respiratory problems can be easily managed provided DIFS, the fear syndrome, can be treated. It is the fear that feeds the illness, and it is the fear that makes us diseased. In yoga, through the process of relaxation, through the process of creating and circulating the life forces in the body, then through the process of managing the mental states of anxiety and stress, fear can be overcome. Once the fear is overcome, disease has no place in life.

The classical term for that would be *maya*, the false becoming real. How else does yoga work besides removing the fear? Besides removing fear, yoga allows the pranic energy to become balanced. Once this vital force is balanced, many of the physiological and psychological imbalances that are the cause of disease are automatically removed.

This is the concept of human health and yoga, applied yoga and yoga therapy. Let us hope that people can be inspired to face the conditions of life with a positive frame of mind, thus experiencing optimum health at all levels of the personality.

How is the link between body and mind managed when treating disease?

Swami Satyananda: The mind and body are really part of one unit but, for the sake of definition and explanation, it can be said that certain diseases are mainly mental in cause while others are mainly physical. Mental diseases cause derangement in the body and physical diseases cause derangement or loss of efficiency of the mind. They are directly related.

The treatment of some diseases needs a more direct physical approach, whether from medicine, yoga asanas, pranayama, or whatever is suitable. The healing system adopted should be one that brings mental relaxation, removal of phobias and any other mental imbalance. In this field, yoga is particularly powerful. It brings wonderful results.

The important thing to remember is that one should adopt a suitable healing system whether the disease is predominantly physical or mental.

How does one's thinking affect disease?

Swami Sivananda: Constant thinking about a disease intensifies the disease. Divert the mind. Always keep it occupied with some interesting work or other. This will minimize the force of the disease.

If the mind constantly thinks of the heart as being in a diseased condition the mental picture of disease, weakness and fear vibrations are telegraphed to the cells of the heart through the efferent nerves. The cells of the heart are further weakened and diseased through the discordant vibrations sent to them from the mind.

Affirmations of health reduce disease. Autosuggestion is another form of psychotherapy. This is beneficial in the treatment of diseases.

How does mental tension affect the body?

Swami Niranjanananda: After food habits, the second cause of disorders in the body is related to the type of thinking. If the mind is unhappy or tense, worried or disturbed, the appetite may disappear and one will not feel like eating. When there is deep involvement in an external situation or a mental state, it affects the body. When negative thoughts, worries, disturbances and mental tensions arise, they have detrimental effects on the body and disorders or diseases take root.

What is the effect of emotions on health?

Swami Niranjanananda: Following diet and mental tensions, the third cause of physical disorders is emotional. Medical science describes it beautifully. It has been shown that when a person is in a state of happiness or sorrow, a hormone called adrenalin is secreted by the adrenal glands. This secretion overexcites the body. It is also closely related to the senses. When one fights with someone, adrenalin is secreted, increasing the rate of respiration. The heartbeat speeds up and the senses immediately become alert. The 'fight or flight' response occurs in both happiness and sorrow.

What is the effect of spiritual turmoil on health?

Swami Niranjanananda: Following diet, mental tension and emotional tension, the fourth cause of disease is spiritual. This may manifest as an unsteady mind, as mental or inner turmoil or in the expression of samskaras and karmas, all of which may have a negative effect on the body.

Modern civilization is deeply involved in materialism; the practices of yoga are oriented towards the whole person, not just the physical body. Therefore, yoga can make an important contribution to health in the modern era.

What is the yogic view of psychosomatic disease?

Swami Niranjanananda: The yogis realized that there are many levels in which one lives, so they devised many small practices and principles which, if followed and adhered to, help change the disruptions to the flow of behavior, emotions, ideas, thoughts and so forth. An unfulfilled expectation or desire leads to discontent, tension, anxiety and eventually high blood pressure, ulcers, hernias, asthma, diabetes. Even medical science says that the majority of problems are psychosomatic in nature. Psychosomatic means something that germinates in the mind and manifests in the body. There are very few problems which are somatopsychic in nature, meaning those that begin with the body and affect the mind.

Psychosomatic problems are many in number, not only the ones identified by the psychiatric associations of the world. Even negativity, anger, jealousy, hatred and greed are distorted conditions of the mind. Be careful of them. Protect your mind from these things. Do not allow yourself to be swayed by hatred and jealousy. If one is swayed by them, the body becomes sick. It becomes diabetic, constipated or cancerous. Hatred is cancer. If one hates or dislikes someone, it means there is cancer in the mind, because it simply grows and grows. How can that be treated?

Negative and destructive tendencies, behaviour and thinking are all illnesses of the mind. If one has them, they should be treated seriously, just as the body would be treated. If one has asthma, an inhaler is used to find relief. If one has hatred for somebody, something must be done to find relief from that hatred. Otherwise, one suffocates in one's own hatred, jealousy, frustration, anxiety and depression. When there is suffocation, one dies. That is certain.

Why does disease occur in people who practise yoga regularly?

Swami Niranjanananda: Sometimes disease manifests in the body despite regular yoga practice. There are two possible

reasons. The first is that even though one is doing yogic practices, there is still no awareness of the body. This may mean that the internal changes which result in disease are not understood.

The second reason is that sometimes an internal organ is already weak or diseased; it is possible that after one or two years of yoga practice this weakness may declare itself, as a process of cleansing begins. One should not feel scared or be afraid if this happens.

What happens when yogis use siddhis to rid the body of disease, or to take karma from others?

Swami Niranjanananda: Yoga accepts that even yogis fall sick. In the lives of many accomplished sadhaks it has been seen that even after attaining a higher state, disease takes their bodies. For example, Ramakrishna Paramahansa had throat cancer. Other yogis are known to have had paralysis, cardiac arrest and brain haemorrhage.

There is a tendency to think that people who have done yogic practices for many years, who have purified their bodies and achieved something in life by reaching a special state, should be able to control physical disease. Certainly there are examples of yogis being able to rid themselves of bodily diseases, whether by yogic practices or by making use of their siddhis, but if the diseases that manifest in their bodies are due to the karmas of others which they have taken upon themselves in an effort to exhaust them, making use of their accomplishments or siddhis would defeat the purpose.

This point has been clearly explained in yogic texts. If siddhis are used in an attempt to exhaust one's karmas, ultimately the karmas will further increase; they will not be exhausted because it is not a natural process. It is similar to taking medicine in an attempt to get rid of a disease, but the medicine only suppresses the symptoms for some time. As long as the medicine is effective the disease is not experienced, but as its effect gradually reduces or ends,

the disease re-emerges with increased force, as in asthma, diabetes, fever and many other conditions.

There is a difference between the suppression of disease and the eradication of disease in a natural way. Keeping this in mind, Sage Gheranda says in *Gheranda Samhita* that if an organ in the body suffers from disease, it should not be taken to mean that there is a shortcoming in one's practice. It is a natural process of life. At such times courage and awareness need to be developed. It indicates that it is time to practise self-analysis or introspection so that the cause of the disease may be understood.

The cause of disease is not always *bhoga*, indulgence in enjoyments, but karma. If disease manifests due to karma, the reason why it is manifesting may not be known, but if awareness and self-analysis are practised during the illness, something can be learnt about why the disease has manifested. For example, it may be due to attachment to pleasure, to some form of self-indulgence, or because a specific change in lifestyle or attitude needs to be made.

Why do the yoga texts often say that a single practice removes all disease?

Swami Niranjanananda: In *Gheranda Samhita* (2:9) the posture of padmasana is described:

*Vaamoroopari dakshinam hi charanam samsthaapy vaamam tathaa
Dakshoroopari paschimena vidhinaa dhritvaa karaabhyaam
dridham;*

*Angushthau hridhaye nidhaaya chibukam naasaagramaalokayet
Etadvyaadhivikaaranaashanakaram padmaasanam prochyate.*

Keeping the left foot over the right thigh and the right foot over the left thigh, bring the arms behind by vyukram method and catch hold of the left big toe with right hand and the right big toe firmly with the left hand, look at the nosetip keeping the chin in contact with the heart. It eradicates all diseases. It is called padmasana.

The verse states that padmasana destroys or eradicates diseases, but Sage Gheranda says practically the same thing about all the asanas. At the end of the description of each asana, it is stated that practising it removes diseases. Even if it is understood that the practice of these static asanas brings the mental benefits of a peaceful mind and a reduction in thoughts and internal excitement, doubts may remain about the removal of physical ailments. Therefore, it needs to be understood how yoga works to overcome disease.

It has often been observed that yogic practices heal many physical diseases. Yoga has even been successfully used in the management of cancer. If diseases like cancer can be prevented and even cured by practices of pranayama, yoga nidra and japa, what is the secret behind it?

With the practice of yoga nidra, the body and antahkarana attain the state of rest. Tension, worries and distresses are removed. Japa increases self-confidence. Pranayama enhances the immune power of the body and balances the pranas.

It is believed that if the body becomes stable or the mind becomes steady and the stability of the mind influences the body, then diseases are eradicated. That is why for almost every asana it is said – *Sarvavyadhi vinashkam* – all types of diseases are removed by it.

What is an example of a practice that heals both body and mind?

Swami Satyananda: Due to the inextricable interlinking of body and mind – ‘as in the body, so in the mind,’ an effect on one cannot pass unnoticed by the other. Moola bandha, and bandhas in general, are physical practices which are a powerful means of relaxing the body and mind.

Moola bandha has the immediate effect of creating a deep sense of mental relaxation, thereby relieving many mental and psychosomatic disorders which are the direct or indirect effect of stress, tension and anxiety. It is an energy-charging practice with specific benefit for many diseases

of mental and pranic origin where there is depression of physical energy, imbalance in the pranic body or imbalance of the mental body. Moola bandha is highly effective when applied to sexual and psychological problems.

Moola bandha has a twofold role in the treatment of disease as both a therapeutic and preventive practice. At the therapeutic level it allows one to regain health on the physical, emotional and mental planes, while at the preventive level it allows one to maintain health and expand the normal, stable function to the cosmic level where so much more can be accomplished and enjoyed. By this subtle yet powerful practice, control is gained over many of the neural, pranic and psychic faculties which have not been consciously used due to ignorance of their existence.

PRANA AND HEALTH

What is the relationship between the physical body and prana?

Swami Niranjanananda: The ancients mentioned that one does not come here only with this gross body, but with many other things along with the gross body. Hatha yoga says very clearly that the body is like a container, a pot, *ghata*. What is a pot used for? To keep things in it. What is kept in this pot that is the body? Only shakti, nothing more than that. This is the basic concept of hatha yoga; that the body is nothing but an expression of shakti, the power, the energy. This idea is further defined in the name 'hatha'. *Ha* is the sound of the solar force, the solar energy, the prana shakti. It is the mantra of prana shakti and it is the mantra of pingala nadi. *Tha* is the mantra of ida nadi, the mental energy. The vital energy and the mental energy are the two energies which direct this body from birth till death.

The management of these two energies, the vital force and the mental force, is the aim and focus of hatha yoga. From the perspective of hatha yoga, and from the perspective of science, one consumes food, and the food is

broken down into protein, minerals, carbohydrates, etc. The energy is then extracted and used by the body, the food itself is not used. If the body is unable to extract the natural source of energy from the product, no matter how much one eats, the body will become weak and die despite eating so much. The body must have the ability to extract the vital energies and forces from the food it consumes: break down the rice, break down the almonds into protein and carbohydrates, and from that take the energy to sustain the body. Waste products are then expelled. It's as simple as that. When one eats and drinks, what is being extracted from the food is energy: energy feeding energy; one energy, prana shakti, being responsible for the experience and the life of another energy, manas shakti. That is the direction of hatha yoga.

Therefore, in this material body, the subtle contained thing is prana. The material body is composed of *anna*, matter, and therefore this is called *annamaya sharir*, the body of matter. But the body is also a container, containing *shakti*, energy. That shakti is another body within this one. It is like an onion: when the outer layer of the onion is peeled, there is an inner layer; when that layer is peeled, there is a third layer; the third layer is peeled and there is a fourth layer. An onion is not made from a single layer, an onion is always made of multiple layers. In the same way, the body is like an onion, there are multiple layers. The next layer is *pranamaya kosha*, the energy body, which is more subtle, as it is what this physical body contains. The heart, liver, kidney and other internal organs are only agents to move that energy through different channels in the body. But the body is the receptacle of shakti, pranamaya kosha.

Why is the effect of yoga on prana important in yogic health management?

Swami Niranjanananda: What is the aim of the physical practices that are performed in yoga? The aim is to harmonize the flows of energy in the body. In the body there is a vital force flowing, which is known as *prana*. The same prana

has been recognized and given different names in different traditions. In the Taoist tradition this force is known as chi energy. In the yogic tradition it is known as pranic energy, and in English it is known as the vital force or energy.

Many attempts have been made to ensure that this energy flows without any blockages, and in the course of history many methods have been devised to stimulate the flow of this vital energy in the body. One such system is acupuncture, which tries to direct and clear the blockages in the energy meridians. In the body there are many currents and flows of pranic force. When they are not flowing harmoniously, the result is disease.

Every human being has a weakness in their body. In situations of conflict, stress or tension, that weak aspect suffers the most: that constitutional weakness will be felt in a certain organ or part of the body. In some people the respiratory system is weak; in a stressful environment they will be more prone to respiratory problems. In others the digestive system is weak; they are prone to digestive disorders in stressful conditions. In some the cardiovascular system is weak; they are prone to cardiovascular problems in stressful situations. The list goes on and on like this. In each individual a different part of the body is weak.

However, it is possible to strengthen the body by stimulating the flow of this vital force. In order to strengthen and stimulate this flow, certain postures are performed. When the postures are performed, the movements influence the internal organs. The first effect that is experienced with the performance of physical postures is an increase in vitality. This has been observed by doctors and scientists who have conducted research into yoga.

Many people speak of the concept of mind over matter, but yoga has another concept. It speaks of energy over mind and matter, because it is energy that controls the mind and the body. Once the vital force is increased with the practice of asanas and pranayamas, all the defects of the body are rectified and physical health and wellbeing are experienced.

Why is hatha yoga so concerned with the idea of balancing the pranas?

Swami Niranjanananda: The purpose and destination of hatha yoga is perceived, is recognized, is known, when the word 'hatha' is understood. Hatha is a combination of two mantras which are in ajna chakra. In the image of ajna chakra, the third eye centre, there are two petals; on one petal *ham* is written, on the other petal, *tham* is written. *Tham* is sometimes substituted by *ksham*, but the actual mantras are *ham* and *tham*. The mantra *ham* represents the flow of the solar energy, the *prana shakti*, through the pingala channel. The mantra *tham* represents the flow of the *chitta shakti*, the mental power through the ida channel. The balance of ida and pingala, the balance between the pranic and the mental energies, is the purpose of hatha yoga.

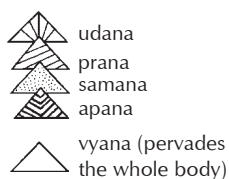
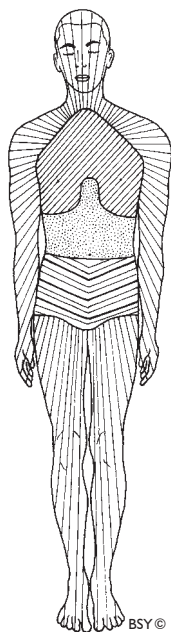
An example: when one sits for an extended period of time in any posture, circulation to certain parts of the body stops. If someone sits cross-legged without being proficient in the practice, then after twenty minutes, half an hour or one hour, when they try to get up, their legs have gone to sleep. Often when one sleeps in a different posture at night, by the morning the arms have gone to sleep and won't even move. It takes a few minutes for the circulation to start and for movement to begin. Blood circulation becomes a factor which can inhibit the movement of a part of the body. In the same way, pranic circulation is also a factor in maintaining the health of a physical organ: disease and illness happen when there is lack of prana in a particular organ. That is the yogic understanding.

Why do digestive problems happen? They happen when prana is not flowing into the digestive system. If prana is not active there, constipation happens, or gastric problems happen, or acidity happens. Once digestion begins to improve, constipation goes away, gastric problems go away, acidity goes away.

Each organ needs to have a certain amount of energy in order to function, just as in outer life each electrical

appliance uses certain volts of electric power to function. That power can be accessed either through a socket in the wall or through a battery, depending on what is required. In the same manner, different organs of the body need power. The brain needs power to function, and one's energy is depleted on a daily basis. When the pranic supply is depleted, one feels tired. When the pranic supply, the pranic shakti is restored through rest, one feels fresh. Yoga has followed this thought in order to understand illness and disease. The dynamic asanas and pranayamas of hatha yoga, help rectify imbalances in the flow of prana shakti into the body and mind. That is the purpose of hatha yoga.

As the balance is restored in the body, the imbalances are removed and the problems reduce. There is an improvement in asthmatic respiratory conditions. There is improvement in the cardiovascular system. There is improvement in the digestive system. In this manner, gradually, through practices of hatha yoga the body achieves a state of wellbeing. This harmony of pranas allows one to focus on the management of the mind; therefore, raja yoga comes after hatha yoga.



The Pranic Body

What is the relationship between the pancha pranas and physical disease?

Swami Satyananda: The processes of respiration, digestion and assimilation are the outcome of the harmonious interaction of the *pancha pranas* or vital airs.

If the prana between the throat and diaphragm is disturbed, various symptoms will manifest. These include hiccups, wheezing, coughs, headache and pain in the ears and eyes.

If disturbance or imbalance between prana and apana is not rectified, various symptoms, complexes and ailments of the respiratory and upper digestive systems manifest, including migraine, indigestion, asthma and infections of the ears, nose and throat.

In *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (2:17) it is written:

*Hikkaa shvaasashcha kaasashcha shirahkarnaakshivedanaah;
Bhavanti vividhaa rogaah pavanasya prakopatah.*

Hiccups, asthma, coughs, headache, ear and eye pain, and various other diseases are due to disturbances of the vital air.

These diseases may become chronic with medicines failing to give lasting relief unless the underlying pranic disturbance is corrected.

How does the free flow of prana bring health?

Swami Satyananda: There are six main junctions within the body known as the chakras. From these junctions thousands of *nadis*, the energy pathways, branch off to different parts of the body such as the kidneys, liver, heart, lungs and intestines; they reach every part of the body. These nadis are so subtle that they carry the finest quality of energy, bringing the finest health. It is through the balancing, generation and proper distribution of this energy that yoga therapy takes place. This is the basis of yoga therapy.

It is commonly experienced that when people with conditions such as diabetes, rheumatism, cardiovascular disease, insomnia, depression and even nervous breakdown, practise yoga asanas, they feel better. The feeling of health, the curing of the disease with yoga, takes place by creating free flow of this finest quality of shakti.

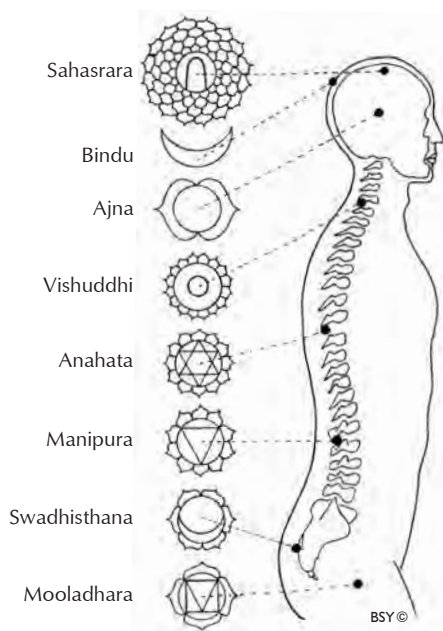
How do the flows of ida and pingala nadis influence health?

Swami Satyananda: In yoga the philosophy is simple; it presupposes two points of energy in the body. The word

‘energy’ is being used here exactly in the sense of energy; it is not being used with a philosophical connotation. Just as there is energy in electrical cables, in the same way yoga postulates two kinds of energy in the physical body. These two kinds of energy are known as consciousness and light, *ida* and *pingala*.

Prana is known as light. It controls all the organs, mobility, temperature, digestion, span of life, etc. While there is prana, one is alive; lack of prana means death. That is one type of energy, called prana.

The second energy is known as consciousness. It can be called the mind, but consciousness is better. Consciousness is not a consequence of matter; in yoga, thought is not a consequence of the brain. According to yoga, consciousness and matter are two entirely different things. This consciousness is responsible for awareness, for knowledge, for the senses, cognition and perception.



Location of the Chakras

These two forces are distributed throughout the body by a network of energy channels, the *nadis*. These two systems control the different organs of the body like the kidneys, heart, lungs and pancreas, and there is a constant flow through each and every organ all the time. When there is a block in the process of energy, disease occurs. Here is a simple example which can be easily understood. The electricity comes to one's house from the power station. It comes to the main switch, then it is

distributed to different circuits in each and every room. If a fuse blows somewhere, that particular circuit will not work. It may be because it has been overloaded or it may be that there is a short circuit. Whatever the cause, that particular circuit will not work until the fuse is repaired.

According to yoga there is a network of 72,000 channels in the body for the flow of energy. Within the framework of the spine there are six important energy centres, the *chakras*; through them, these two forms of energy are distributed to every part of the body. These two energies must work in harmony, in balance. That is the program of yoga, and yoga means 'harmony'. I am not talking about social harmony. I am talking about harmony in the physical body.

When there is disharmony, there is disease, either a physical disease or a psychic disease. When *pranas* are at their lowest ebb, there is physiological disease, when the consciousness is at its lowest ebb, there is psychic disease. So physiological disease should be counteracted through yoga postures and yoga breathing, and psychic diseases must be counteracted through relaxation and meditation. However, yoga goes beyond this. Sooner or later yoga therapy will become a science; first it may be a preventive science, then a curative science, but eventually it has to become a promotive science.

What happens when *ida* or *pingala nadi* does not function properly?

Swami Satyananda: What is a disease? There may be many definitions but the yogic definition says that disease is nothing but an imbalance in the energy distribution in the body. The body is not made up of bone, blood and marrow – one lives by *prana* and thinks by mind. These are the two forms of energy, controlled respectively by *pingala* and *ida*. If one of these nadis is not functioning properly, the body falls sick.

Ida and *pingala* are the two energy principles. If they are not supplied to different parts of the body, one suffers, just

as one suffers from malnutrition. For example, if someone can't get to sleep at night, what can be done? People take tranquillizers because they only know that much. But yoga knows a little more: change the nadi, and sleep will come.

Hatha yogis try to balance these two poles of energy in the body. Whenever there is sickness – not cholera, or typhoid or smallpox or that type of disease – but chronic diseases that are common nowadays, such as diabetes, blood pressure, sleeplessness, migraine, sinusitis or digestive upsets, it shows that something is fundamentally wrong in the body's balance of energy.

This energy should not be misunderstood or confused with the energy one gets from vitamins or calories. This is the fundamental energy which was assigned in the third month inside the mother's womb. That is the energy, those are the two batteries, right and left.

What is the effect on health of long-term dominance by ida or pingala nadi?

Swami Satyananda: If one is excessively worried about work (or any other external preoccupations), and if the body is being pushed beyond its limits, pingala will tend to be the predominant flow, day and night. If this imbalance continues over a long period of time, the physical and pranic bodies become disharmonized, and illness results. This is the situation for many people in the modern competitive world, who are too active and tense. Such long-term imbalance and disharmony is one of the reasons for the prevalence of diseases such as cancer.

On the other hand, a person who broods a great deal, who continually dwells on problems and who does little work or has few outside interests will have a predominance of ida. He will also suffer eventually, whether from lack of physical exercise, or from mental problems such as neurosis.

Balance between ida and pingala is essential. There must be equilibrium between introversion and extroversion. When this is not the case, the human system eventually takes

steps to compensate for the imbalance. This takes the form of conditions such as illness, fatigue and depression. It is a natural law; if this law of the body is broken, then the penalty must be paid. If one feels tired, then rest; if one feels active then work or play hard. Try to follow the natural rhythm of body and mind. It is when the body is pushed too hard due to ambition, fears, desires or whatever, that imbalance occurs. One must listen to one's body and mind and follow its laws. This is not easy, but through the practise of yoga it becomes progressively easier.

Why is the effect of asanas on the chakras beneficial to health?

Swami Satyananda: Remember that hatha yoga is not just physical yoga. The asanas are not exercises. They are the practices which have to be done for the awakening or purifying of the chakras, which are the distributing centres of the pranic and mental energy throughout the body.

People recover from illnesses by the practice of asanas because the blocks in the chakras are cleared. It is not due to pressure on the abdomen or kidneys that one recovers; when the blocks in the chakras are cleared, they are able to supply mental energy and pranic energy to the suffering organ.

Why are asanas important in curing disease and maintaining health?

Swami Satyananda: When the chakras are blocked, when swadhisthana or manipura or anahata, or vishuddhi is blocked, what happens? If there is a block of electrical energy to a house, no lights will come on. This microphone will get sick, these lights will get sick, as energy is not flowing to them. One does not fall sick on any other account, please remember. All the sicknesses, all the mental problems, all the personality problems, are due to lack of energy. When the shakti is supplemented, when the shakti is properly distributed, one recovers. If manipura is not awakened,

there will be diseases of digestion. If anahata is blocked, and energy does not go to that realm, there will be diseases of the heart and lungs.

There are a large number of asanas but eighty-four are considered important, and out of eighty-four asanas, a few have been chosen by the acharyas and mahatmas. These asanas are taught for practising every morning to tone up the muscles and to massage the body, but please remember the truth – that through asanas you are clearing the traffic jam, the block.

How does the energy supply to the chakras affect physical health?

Swami Satyananda: The six main chakras are the junctions through which the energy is distributed to the different areas in the body. If these junctions are not functioning well, if these junctions are full of rust, the energy will not flood through them.

Each and every chakra supplies energy to a certain area. Swadhisthana chakra supplies shakti to the kidneys, bladder, uterus, genital, urinary and ovarian systems. If swadhisthana chakra is not able to supply the proper amount of energy to these particular organs of the body there will be kidney disease, bladder disease, uterus disease, ovarian disease and genital disease. If one electrical junction is cut off there is sickness in all the light bulbs. If one electrical junction is cut off or the fuse is taken out, there will be a problem with running a microphone, a sound box, the lighting.

In the same way, manipura chakra controls the process of digestion, enzymes, elimination and so on and so forth. The energy from anahata chakra is distributed for the maintenance of the heart, lungs and certain glands. It is a matter of great detail which chakra controls which parts of the body. People say, “Swamiji, I am having a liver problem.” They are told, “Do bhujangasana.” They ask, “On what basis is this swami teaching bhujangasana?” They want it to be explained, but how can it be explained? They think

that cortisones are final, that adrenalin is final. But in yoga, everything is final. Yes, it is important that the microphone must be in working order, but it is more important that the energy to the microphone is flowing; but people just talk about the fitness of the microphone and do not talk about the energy, the shakti.

When these asanas are practised the chakras are awakened and the chakras are the junctions of the two types of energy: the pranic energy controlling the *karmendriyas*, organs of action, and the mental energy controlling the *jnanendriyas*, the sensory organs.

How does imbalance in the chakras relate to disease in the body?

Swami Niranjanananda: There can never be an imbalance in the chakras. However, when prana is imbalanced, then there will be problems related to the lungs, heart, circulatory system, etc. When there is an imbalance in apana, there will be problems or diseases of the reproductive organs, kidneys, pancreas, liver and intestines. Having the appendix removed is a samana problem. Digestive problems, constipation, gas, indigestion and gall bladder problems represent imbalance of samana. These are physical conditions related with the physical pranas.

There are also certain mental conditions which are related with the pranas, but it is normally said that they are related to the chakras. The common understanding of the chakras and the theory which is generally given is different to the actual principles of energy in the chakras.

Swadhisthana is generally described as representing the unconscious mind. Actually it represents the unmanifest mind and there is a great difference between the unmanifest mind and the unconscious. If somebody suffers from an attack of anxiety or depression or lack of proper positive self-image then that condition is generally attributed to swadhisthana chakra. These psychological conditions are supposed to be inherent in the unconscious mind. If

somebody has emotional problems or traumas, it is said that anahata is playing up. So in that sense, one can relate a psychic or psychological problem with a particular chakra. Each problem tends to correspond to a particular quality and nature of a chakra.

However, in reality even the psychological problems are related with the manifestations of the pranas. The chakras simply represent a concept and a dimension of experience of the manifestation of consciousness and energy. Therefore, attributing psychological or emotional problems to the chakras is wrong.

With the practices of hatha yoga, pranayama, raja yoga, kriya yoga or kundalini yoga, often in the process of rebalancing the pranas, many of the physiological and psychological disorders clear up. This is because these practices first balance out or harmonize the pranic body before the practitioner attempts to awaken the chakras. With the ironing out of the pranamaya kosha or pranic body, 99.9% of human problems are sorted out.

The remaining 0.1% sorts itself out when the chakras open up, and that 0.1% is a very deep psychic fear, not a disease or illness. Fixing that psychic fear is the quick-fix glue that fixes everything except broken hearts. It can fix anything and everything, and it joins everything together in the same way. The fear of losing one's identity is the fear that is dealt with finally with the awakening of the chakras. Nobody wants to lose their identity, as that is the glue of the personality, which holds the body, mind, emotions and spirit together. The identity of 'I am'.

A big problem arises when this fear is not dealt with properly and kundalini is awakened. It has been called the great kundalini crack-up, or explosion. It is the breaking up of every kind of personality structure; one loses self-control and becomes directionless. There is no treatment for that condition. Well, there is one, which is very hard, but that cannot be told – it is one of the secret tools of the trade.

Why are asanas and pranayamas so effective at healing so-called incurable conditions?

Swami Satyananda: The asanas are intended to purify and correct the 72,000 distribution channels of the twin energy forces in the body; that is why, when people with diseases practise asanas, they begin to feel better. In the beginning I was astounded when I saw people getting absolutely better and I thought that it was faith that was doing the miracle, not asanas. Later I realized specifically it was the asanas. When I made scientific observations and investigations I came to understand that mind was not a sinner or *rakshasa*, the mind is not a demon. I came to realize that mind is a principle of energy in this physical body and on account of improper distribution of energy to different organs of the body, the body was suffering.

From that time I began to talk to psychiatrists. I told them that mind is not a psychological stuff, it is not a philosophical or metaphysical stuff. Don't classify it into conscious, subconscious and unconscious; mind as an energy should be classified into time, space and object. Energy has to be classified as a material substance and not as conscious, subconscious, and unconscious. This is precisely why psychiatrists have failed, because they don't really understand what the mind is.

The removal of blockages in the energy distribution centres of the body by asanas is known; therefore, the asanas should be learned properly from a teacher who can explain them fully. It is not a matter of faith. In India and also in other countries, eighty to ninety percent of the diseases that people suffer from are being successfully treated and cured by the practice of asanas. For example diabetes, sciatica, slipped disc, asthma, migraine, obesity, retroversion of the uterus, prolapse, kidney problems and peptic ulcer. All these diseases have been declared incurable by medical science – incurable in the sense that one must keep on taking the medicine; when the patient asks when do I get better, they are told, “Oh, you have to take it for your whole lifetime”.

Medicine is a science, but nevertheless the limitations of any science have to be pointed out. For example, diabetes is not a disease of the digestive system. It is a disease which has to do with the nervous system. It is not purely a disease of the pancreatic gland. Glands work on the sympathetic and parasympathetic monitorings. If these nervous systems are blocked, paralyzed, become weak and do not function on account of many factors, these glands which should receive monitoring from the nervous systems do not receive it at all, and consequently the disease related to that particular gland occurs. If the health of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems can be corrected, not only can the pancreatic glands be rejuvenated, but even the adrenal and thyroid glands; consequently asthmatic diseases can also be cured.

How is this done? How can they be strengthened? How is the health of the nervous system repaired? In yoga, pranayama is another category of practice about which there are many misconceptions. Some of the misconceptions are: celibacy must be observed, a vegetarian diet must be taken; people have many, many funny notions. They cannot all be discussed here. Pranayama is practised in order to strengthen the nervous system.

Why is pranayama recommended for the management of disease?

Swami Niranjanananda: *Prana* means life force, and *ayama* signifies regulation or control. Thus *pranayama* means regulating the life force. Sages have linked this life force with the breath in a gross form. Every living being breathes, and through the medium of the breath the flow of prana and life in the body take place. If one stops inhaling, the lack of prana in the body is felt, discomfort and unrest prevail and if one is forced to keep on holding the breath, death finally comes. For this reason the sages have linked the breath with the life force. According to them, physical health can be gained by controlling prana shakti through the practices of pranayama, thus sustaining the body. In *Gheranda Samhita* (5:1) it is written:

*Athaatah sampravakshyaami praanaayaamasya sadvidhim;
Yasya saadhanamaatrena devatulyo bhavennarah.*

Now I shall explain the technique of pranayama, by the mere practice of which a human being becomes like a god (a deva).

Sage Gheranda has compared the human body to a *deva sharira*, the body of a divine being or god, which is pure, clean, light, free from disease and luminous. He has taught pranayama with the intention of achieving such a divine body. This indicates that many problems can be eliminated by pranayama practice. Pranayama is the basis of the yogic management of disease.

Sage Gheranda prescribes pranayama for the treatment of all diseases linked with the breathing system and the flow of prana. In the present era, research has proved that a large number of psychosomatic, somopsychic diseases and mental imbalances like distress and worry can be removed by pranayama.

How can pranic healing be developed?

Swami Sivananda: Those who practise pranayama can impart their prana for healing disease. They can also recharge themselves with prana in no time by practising kumbhaka.

If there is a rheumatic patient, his legs can be gently shampooed with one's hands. While the shampooing is being done, practise kumbhaka and imagine the prana flowing from the hands towards the patient. Create a connection with *hiranyagarbha* or the cosmic prana, and imagine the cosmic energy flowing through the hands towards the patient. The patient will at once feel warmth, relief and strength. One should try this for healing oneself once or twice. The conviction will grow stronger.

Headache, intestinal colic, or any other disease can be cured by massage and by one's magnetic touch. When the liver, spleen, stomach, or any other portion or organ of the body is massaged, speak to the cells and give them orders:

“O cells! Discharge your functions properly. I command you to do so.” They will obey these orders. They, too, have subconscious intelligence. One should repeat one’s own mantra when passing prana to others. Try a few cases and competence will come.

Faith, imagination, attention and interest play an important part in curing diseases by taking prana to the diseased areas. When one’s concentration and practice advance, many diseases can be cured by mere touch. In the advanced stages, many diseases are cured by mere will.

What causes low energy levels?

Swami Satyananda: There are so many causes for low energy levels, but one thing is definite, the nervous system is not responding to the intake of energy. In the nervous system there is an electrical inflow. Just as there are negative and positive wires in cables, the nervous system carries two types of energy: the pranic energy and the mental energy.

Sometimes nerves are shattered from overuse; there are so many ways by which they can be overused. When this happens, the nervous system refuses to accept the quantum of energy and at the same time there are blocks of energy created in the body. The points, the meridians, get blocked at some points, so energy does not move. This is one of the important reasons for lack of energy in the nervous system.

Sometimes one thinks too much, unnecessarily: just as one does physical acrobatic feats, one keeps on doing mental acrobatic feats all the time. But the mind does not have infinite energy. It gets exhausted. If a battery-operated transistor is left on all night, by the morning the battery will be flat.

People are not aware of the principle of preservation so far as the mind is concerned. When the mind is tired, nature creates a defense mechanism; if that defense mechanism was not there, the heart would be affected, the digestive system would be impaired and there would be side effects throughout the body. Nature, therefore, creates a defense mechanism.

That defense mechanism is something people like: to sleep and sleep and sleep endlessly. Or sometimes one doesn't want to think. Or nature creates a lack of energy. One believes, "Oh, I have no energy." There is energy, but a defense mechanism is working, and it makes one believe, "I have no energy." Whatever work is given, the answer is, "Oh I have no energy, I cannot work." This is how nature is trying to defend and to protect you.

In the opinion of yoga, that state of energylessness is due to an imbalance between the behaviors of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. A balance in behaviour or interaction between the two has to be brought about. Perhaps one is eating too much, or maybe one does not have much work; or maybe the family situation is awkward; or maybe one is passing through some crisis in life. All these and many other factors are at the base of the symptom of lack of energy.

How is prana rebalanced in yoga therapy?

Swami Niranjanananda: According to the yogic concepts, disease begins with an imbalance of prana. Blood has to circulate all over the body, and if blood is not circulating efficiently through the body, there is going to be stiffness in the joints and numbness in the muscles. To remove that condition the flow must be mobilized. Similarly, there has to be a continuous flow of prana shakti. If prana shakti is blocked in any part of the body, that part is going to suffer because of deficiency in prana.

What is the yogic therapy for a headache? Bhramari, neti, kapalbhati, shashankasana. Why will neti get rid of a headache? Why will bhramari or kapalbhati or shashankasana get rid of a headache? If one persists in these practises, one becomes free from headaches, but why? These practices, especially neti, act like acupressure for the nerves, which are supersensitive in the sinus areas. After a hard day at work one feels physically and mentally drained, but if one practises pranayama, neti and after that shavasana for some

time, the body regains its lost vitality, as these practices tend to rectify the deficiency in prana shakti. Different parts of the body are affected by deficient prana shakti, and different dimensions of mind are also affected by lack of prana shakti.

When trying to restore health, the yoga teacher first tries to analyze the areas of the body where there is stagnation of prana. Once that area has been identified, the person is instructed to do some practices which restore the flow of prana, and the person starts to feel better. In the management of disease, pranayama is the first aspect, then people who have the inclination and can go deeper should practise prana vidya along with other yogic techniques. Also, if the deficiency is in prana, if there is an imbalance in prana, that imbalance can be rectified with the practice of mantras.

Does all disease start in the mind?

Swami Satyananda: Many people say that all diseases are created in the mind. This is correct, but not in the absolute sense. Many years ago, I was of the opinion that every disease originated in the mind. I used to tell everyone that their disease was mental, not physical, but when I saw people get better by practising hatha yoga, pranayama, and other techniques, I was obliged to change my way of thinking. The origin of disease is not only in the mind, it is in the body also. Many diseases do originate in the mind and travel into the body; they are known as psychosomatic diseases. When disease originates in the body and travels into the mind, it is known as somatopsychic disease.

Body is the base and prana is the force. The body and mind cannot exist without prana; prana is the foundation of human health and illness. Therefore, in hatha yoga as well as in tantra, one talks of somatopsychic illness; when prana is supplied to the different parts of the body, this type of illness is being treated. Even a psychological illness can be treated by supplying prana. Therefore, in yoga the hypothesis is that all diseases are caused by improper distribution of prana in the physical body.

Even those diseases which are regarded as psychological in nature are actually caused by an imbalance in the pranic distribution. For example, vishuddhi chakra is one of the main distribution stations. It is situated at the junction in the neck, and the pranas are distributed from vishuddhi to different parts of that area: ears, eyes, nose, throat, thyroid, parathyroid, thymus, etc. If there is improper distribution of prana to the thyroid, emotional diseases occur. Many emotional complexes which people suffer from are directly caused by hypothyroidism or hyperthyroidism; this condition results from improper distribution of prana from vishuddhi chakra. Therefore, an emotional problem arising from improper distribution of prana in the thyroid complex should be termed as somatopsychic, not psychosomatic.

As a second example, consider manipura chakra, behind the navel. This is the main distribution centre for the digestive system and the adrenal glands. The adrenals produce the hormone adrenalin. If there is an improper distribution of prana from manipura chakra to the adrenal glands, that person will suffer from fear psychosis, colitis, and other somatic diseases.

The third example is an important one. Swadhisthana chakra, located at the coccyx, is the distributing station for all the urogenital organs except the testicles. These include the uterus, ovaries, kidneys, bladder, and urinary organ. If improper distribution of prana takes place, or excess energy is used by these particular organs, these will be problems related to this centre. Sometimes, people who are suffering from frigidity or impotence go to the doctor, who immediately tells them, "You have a psychological problem. Something from your childhood is affecting you." This theory is not entirely incorrect. Childhood experiences do have an influence on present behaviour patterns, but it must be remembered that any type of frigidity or impotence may not be psychosomatic; it may be somatopsychic.

2

Yoga and Health Management

HATHA YOGA: FOUNDATION FOR HEALTH

Why does yoga promote good health?

Swami Sivananda: Health is one's birthright, not disease; strength is one's heritage, not weakness; efficiency, not inefficiency; courage, not fear; bliss, not sorrow; peace, not restlessness; knowledge, not ignorance; immortality, not mortality.

Attain good health! Without health, how can one live? Without health, how can one earn? Without health, how can one succeed in yoga or any undertaking? Possess wonderful health through the practice of hatha yoga. Attain this birthright or divine heritage, and shine as a fully developed yogi, radiating joy, peace, bliss and knowledge everywhere.

Why is hatha yoga the foundation for health?

Swami Satyananda: The practices of hatha yoga are powerful, efficient and systematic.

Why is hatha yoga important?

Swami Sivananda: Hatha yoga is a divine blessing for attaining success in any field. The body and mind are instruments which the practice of hatha yoga keeps sound, strong and full of energy. It is a unique armour of defence to

battle the opposing forces in the material and spiritual fields. The hatha yogi seeks to have a body which is as strong as steel, healthy, free from suffering and therefore, long-lived. The master of the body is the master of both life and death. His lustrous form enjoys the vitality of youth.

By the practices of hatha yoga a perfect physical body, which is a fit instrument for the mind, can be achieved. A perfect mind develops, and in samadhi passes into pure consciousness itself. With hatha yoga one can combat diseases of the body and mind and attain radiant health and God-realization. By the practice of hatha yoga, one can become a spiritual hero, full of physical, mental and spiritual strength.

Why is hatha yoga the foundation of spiritual life?

Swami Sivananda: God-realization is not possible without sadhana. Spiritual practice is not possible without good health. The practice of yogic exercises is conducive to health and longevity. It regulates the action of the heart, lungs and brain. It promotes digestion and circulation of the blood and removes all sorts of diseases. The objective of hatha yoga exercises is to enable one to possess a high standard of health, vigour and vitality.

Why was hatha yoga developed?

Swami Niranjanananda: In English the word ‘disease’ is composed of two different words – disturb plus ease. When the ease of the body is disturbed, when the comfort of the body is disturbed, when the harmony of the body is disturbed, disease arises. The literal meaning of the word disease is ‘disturbed ease of the body’.

To manage that, the yogis thought of ways to influence the body and bring the internal systems and organs into balance. To deal with the body they came up with the system of hatha yoga, so that diseases could be removed, and comfort, ease, stamina and health could be achieved.

Why is hatha yoga needed for success in other branches of yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Contrary to the popular belief that hatha yoga is only the practice of asanas and nothing more, hatha yoga is a very important aspect of yoga; it is like the primary class to which one must be admitted before continuing study in higher grades. Admission to yoga takes place through hatha yoga. Admission to yoga does not take place through *dhyana* or meditation, admittance to the yogic journey does not happen with kriya yoga and kundalini yoga. Rather one is admitted into yoga education when hatha yoga is begun. Yoga begins with hatha yoga: preparation of and purification of the physical body and the pranas by practising the shatkarmas, asanas, pranayamas and pratyahara. These belong to the primary education of yoga.

Everyone is aware of the body because it is something which is physical, visible, and can be touched, felt, experienced. The body is something gross, physical, material, with which one can identify; one can see it, and it is used to fulfil one's aspirations and ambitions. This is why the wellbeing of the physical structure was a concern for the yogis. If the body is sick, how will the other practices be done? Try practising meditation while having an asthma attack – not possible. Try awakening kundalini while having a hernia or an abdominal ulcer – not possible. The mind will be diverted to the problem rather than focusing on the practice. It is impractical to practise yoga if one is not well, it doesn't happen.

Therefore, the welfare of the body was a concern for the yogis, and to manage the disturbed conditions of the body they came up with and developed the science and the subject of hatha yoga. Hatha yoga contains many different groups of practices such as asanas, pranayamas, shatkarmas, mudras and bandhas, whose purpose is to realign the energy flows in the body and mind.

Why is hatha yoga necessary for those who focus on another branch of yoga?

Swami Satyananda: Those who have been practising hatha yoga should now take inspiration. It is often said that one should strive for something very high and not merely confine oneself to hatha yoga. It is as though other yogas are superior to hatha yoga. But whichever yoga one practises – whether jnana yoga, raja yoga, karma yoga or laya yoga – hatha yoga is the foundation. Whichever yoga one tries to go through, the mistake should never be made of practising it without properly going through hatha yoga.

Hatha yoga provides the foundation for all the higher yogas. It is the one yoga that is down-to-earth and practical. It talks about the body and the prana. It teaches postures. It balances the nervous and endocrine systems. It purifies and balances the metabolism, anabolism and catabolism. Yoga is not an abstract science, it is a concrete science. In yoga it is known that one cannot think properly unless the body is purified, the nervous systems are under control, and the pranas are functioning well. At the same time, yoga talks about the mind and the various stages of consciousness, and goes on to teach the most wonderful science of meditation.

Why is hatha yoga the foundation of all yoga?

Swami Satyananda: Even if the physical body is completely degenerated, one should practise hatha yoga. Most people's bodies are quite incapable nowadays, like old motor cars. The brakes are out of order; the gears are out of order, and sometimes even the engine does not function. Can one run a car with flat tyres? Who wants to drive a car without brakes? The brakes must be strong. If the body is in this type of condition, hatha yoga should first be practised to repair the body.

After repairs, it can be painted. After the car has been painted, a good driver is necessary – that's very important. A good car with a bad driver only leads to accidents and

mechanical failure. High blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes and insomnia are all forms of mechanical failure, not disease. One should first repair the body; use asana and pranayama, then the energy will wake up.

Why is hatha yoga so effective at restoring health?

Swami Satyananda: In the present context of society and health, hatha yoga is a panacea, a great helper; doctors have proved beyond doubt that in diabetes, blood pressure, peptic ulcer, migraine, sciatica, sleeplessness, asthma and many diseases, yoga is not a treatment, but a cure.

Importantly, it is not only a cure for the disease, it is also a cure for the patient. When one suffers from asthma for twenty years, there is not only the disease of asthma to treat; the patient also becomes mentally sick. Even if one's asthma is gone, the effect of the asthma remains in the mind; the person continues to suffer from a phobia, from a complex or from a personality trait that leads to another disease developing. It's not only the actual sickness, it's not only the particular disease that needs treatment: the patient needs to be treated as a whole, and that is possible with yoga.

Supposing someone suffers from high blood pressure and goes to the best doctor. He is treated and the blood pressure comes down; however, the fear of having high blood pressure will not go unless the personality is treated. Both the treatment of the sickness itself and the treatment of the person must take place at the same time. This is why yoga starts not only with the *nadis*, energy channels, but also with the mind: that's why it is called hatha yoga.

Hatha yoga does not mean yoga by force. *Ha* and *tha* are two letters which symbolize the two energies of the body. *Ha* represents the mental, *tha* represents the pranic energy. Mental energy is the energy through which one knows and thinks, while pranic energy is the energy through which one lives. Both these energies must be kept in balance for proper mental and physical health.

What are the rules for health?

Swami Sivananda: The rules for health are: bask in the sun daily; take fruits and nuts; do not overload the stomach; run in the open air; do surya namaskara; rise before sunrise; practise sirshasana, sarvangasana and paschimottanasana; pray regularly; be bold and cheerful; meditate and sing; take tomatoes and spinach, lemon and radish; fast and rest.

How can yoga help the immune system?

Swami Satyananda: A lot of study has been done on this point. In ancient days many saints practised austerities, penances, and lived a perfectly healthy life. Disease, bacteria and viruses, did not affect them. Yogis and swamis living in the Himalayas eat little, do not get nutrition or vitamins and live almost naked, yet they are healthy. They do not suffer from malnutrition. For days together they do not drink water, but they do not suffer from dehydration. They expose themselves to the chill and winds of the Himalayas, but do not catch cold or sinusitis. Why? That was the question. In the Soviet Union a lot of research was conducted on the effects of pranayama on resistance and immunity, not only from external factors or internal factors, but also from the influence of planets on one's body.

They found that the practice of yoga in general, and the practice of pranayama in particular, improves the body's immune system. The practice of pranayama definitely improves not only immunity, but all the systems that defend the body from extraneous factors.

Why does the inner journey of yoga begin with the practice of asanas and pranayamas?

Swami Niranjanananda: The inner personality does not exist without the support of the physical body. Therefore, in order to develop an understanding of the body as it relates to the inner personality, yogis evolved and developed the system of physical postures, *asanas*. In the present age, researchers and scientists have investigated the effects of asanas on

the human body and mind, discovering that the greatest imbalances can be removed with the simplest practices.

Researchers have found that the correct application of yoga techniques can help to manage illnesses such as diabetes, asthma, digestive disorders, circulatory problems, even cancer. There is a lot of scientific evidence available today to show that many illnesses and diseases can be removed by practising asana and pranayama; the body can then experience total health. Physical imbalances and illnesses are managed with the practice of asana. Imbalances in the realm of vitality and energy are balanced with the breathing techniques, pranayama.

How does this happen? Science will say that imbalances created by sedentary lifestyle, stress and tension, affecting the performance of the internal organs, are managed. But from the yogic perspective, health is attained as one becomes aware of the needs of the body and learns to adjust to its requirements, to tune the biorhythms to one's lifestyle and environment, and experience health.

PURIFICATION

What is the best way to maintain a healthy body?

Swami Satyananda: As with a car, one's body requires constant attention and care. It requires regular servicing and cleaning of its major organs and parts. The hatha yoga shatkarmas are prescribed for the constant care and cleaning of the body and mind.

By the practices of neti, dhauti, nauli, basti, kapalbhati and trataka, one is able to maintain the body against the wear and tear of life. Excess waste materials that build up in the different parts of the body are eliminated.

Why is purification of the body by hatha yoga important?

Swami Niranjanananda: There are four areas in which yoga works: body, mind, emotions and spirit. What does yoga do for the body? This is not about the stretches that are done to

loosen up, but what is the aim of yoga for the body? The aim of yoga for the body is purification, detoxification, removal of toxins from the body to encourage optimum health, so that body does not become a restriction for furthering one's spiritual and mental development.

This purification of the body, balance of the body, and harmony of the body, has a deep connection with the mind and emotions. If the body is at rest, the mind will be at rest. If the body is full of toxins and impurities, the mind will be full of toxins and impurities. When yogis conceived hatha yoga, their original idea was detoxification of the body, purification of the body and harmony in the body: that is the first stepping stone.

Yoga practitioners need to think – in all of their years of asana practice, has the body been detoxified? No. Yet the aim of hatha yoga is this, and it has been forgotten for the sake of stretching the body to release the stresses. That is necessary, yes, it should be done, but just to feel light is not the purpose of hatha; detoxification is the purpose of hatha yoga, and for that, the full hatha yoga system must be followed.

What effect do the shatkarmas have on the doshas?

Swami Satyananda: The shatkarmas are used to balance the three *doshas* or humours in the body: *kapha*, mucus; *pitta*, bile; and *vata*, wind. According to both Ayurveda and hatha yoga, an imbalance in the doshas results in illness.

How do the shatkarmas affect the body?

Swami Niranjanananda: Through the shatkarmas, harmonization of ida and pingala, the two main flows of prana, is established, resulting in physical and mental purity and balance. The shatkarmas also balance vata, pitta, and kapha, the three disorders created in the body. According to Ayurveda and hatha yoga, any imbalance in these three disorders gives rise to disease. Additionally, the shatkarmas are used before pranayama and other higher practices of

yoga so that the body becomes free from disease and does not create any obstacles on the spiritual path. *Gheranda Samhita* (1:10) states:

*Shatkarmanaa shodhanam cha aasanena bhaveddridham;
Mudrayaa sthirataa chaiva pratyaaahaarena dheerataa.*

Through shatkarmas purification of body and through asanas firmness, through mudras steadiness and through pratyahara patience is achieved.

Why is it important to cleanse the internal body?

Swami Niranjanananda: Cleaning the body internally is as important as cleaning the body externally. How would it feel not to clean one's mouth or brush the teeth for one week? If you do not know, try it. How would it feel not to go to the toilet for a week? If you do not know, try it.

Cleaning the body is necessary in order to experience harmony and balance inside. Cleansing the body directly affects how the mind is experienced. If one's internal body is unclean, a certain disharmony is felt in the mind. Recognizing this particular tendency, hatha yoga developed the shatkarma practices.

How does the accumulation of bodily waste affect overall health?

Swami Satyananda: The human body functions along simple lines. Just as a machine produces wastes, the physical body continuously produces wastes. These wastes are of three types: mucus, gas and acidity. If the body is internally cleansed from time to time, the excess of these three metabolic products is removed, and their formation is regulated and balanced. Perfect health can then be maintained.

This is why the practice of the six hatha yoga shatkarmas is of such great importance. Cleansing the body of the three types of wastes accumulated in the system is an important aspect of hatha yoga therapy.

Does purification of the body through shatkarmas extend the lifespan?

Swami Niranjanananda: After purification a human being lives longer on this earth. The Upanishads and Vedas state in a number of places that human beings live for a hundred years. This is not only the thinking of the Vedas, Upanishads or ancient philosophies, it is the truth. If a human being remains healthy and free from disease, living for a hundred years or more is natural. Accurate genetic copying of the cells can continue for that length of time if the programming is not disrupted by impurities or imbalances.

How does purifying the physical body affect the pranic body?

Swami Satyananda: It is said in hatha yoga that in this physical body there are hundreds and thousands of channels or flows of energy, and everywhere this energy is facing a blockage due to impurities. What is hatha yoga? Nowadays people think that postures are hatha yoga, but actually hatha yoga is a systematic practice in which the purification of the physical body is taught.

There are six practices through which the physical body is purified. When the body is purified, these *nadis* or channels of energy become free from obstruction and the pranas flow freely, the consciousness flows freely. There is no blockage; one can experience perfect health, a perfect state of mind, and perfect understanding of one's self.

How do wastes in the physical body interfere with the pranic body?

Swami Satyananda: The interior of the body must be pure. For example, fermentation of mucus interferes with the pranic activities. That is why the stomach, intestines, nose, mouth and whole body must be properly cleaned. This physical body is a combination and permutation of the five elements: ether, air, fire, water and earth. If these five elements are not purified, they interfere with the activities of prana. In order

to purify these elements in the body, hatha yoga must be practised.

Why is mayurasana recommended for purifying the whole body?

Swami Satyananda: Mayurasana is a unique asana in that it vigorously stimulates all body processes. It stimulates the blood circulation and the process of metabolism. It thereby helps to purify the blood and in turn the whole body.

Those with a bad complexion and boils are advised to practise mayurasana combined with a simple diet and external application of amaroli.

How does simhagarjanasana optimize purification through the lymphatic system?

Swami Satyananda: This practice is also known as simhasana and simha mudra, and in the yoga Upanishads as *simhagarjanasana* (roaring lion pose). Simha kriya gives an excellent massage and stimulation to the organs of the throat, in particular the tonsils. These two insignificant looking guardians of the throat have a decisive role to play in maintaining good health. The tonsils are part of the lymphatic system and are known as lymph nodes.

One of the functions of the lymphatic system is to eliminate toxins from the body. As such they perform an essential role, for it is due to the accumulation of toxins that germs breed, resulting in disease. Poisons and bacteria that are mopped up in the system are trapped and concentrated in the lymph nodes, including the tonsils, prior to expulsion from the body. This bacteria is neutralized by antibodies which are produced within the lymph nodes.



Simhagarjanasana

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Sometimes, however, the build-up of toxins within the system

becomes too great and this overwhelms the lymph nodes. Under these circumstances the nodes themselves become infected. In the case of the tonsils the result is a painful inflammation and fever known as tonsillitis.

Through asanas and pranayamas the entire body is purified of poisons and the occurrence of tonsillitis and other ailments connected with the lymphatic system becomes less likely. Simha kriya in particular, influences the tonsils. It stimulates the blood flow to the tonsils and thereby flushes out accumulated toxins. As such it is a powerful technique for preventing tonsillitis.

The tonsils depend on a good blood supply for efficient functioning. The blood often becomes congested in this region especially when one's system is particularly toxic during tonsillitis. Simha kriya massages the throat region and squeezes out stagnant, impure blood so that it returns to the kidneys for purification. At the end of practising simha kriya, the muscles and blood vessels of the throat are relaxed. This allows a freshly oxygenated supply of blood to circulate in this region, which has a wonderfully rejuvenating effect on the tonsils, helping to improve the health of the whole body as well as removing the causes of tonsillitis.

In the throat there are many other vital organs. These include the thyroid glands, the pharynx, the larynx and the salivary glands as well as the auditory system in general. All of these receive a wonderful massage in the same way as described for the tonsils. Since these provide essential functions of the body, the improvement in their health through the simple practice of simha kriya can have vast repercussions on one's life.

All nerves connecting the body to the brain must pass through the neck region. It is a vital crossroad. Also in the throat region there are various nerve plexuses which control the organs of the throat. Simha kriya stretches these nerves and removes stagnant blood, allowing an influx of fresh blood. This, together with the stimulation that the nerves

also receive, results in better nerve connections to the brain and in turn increased efficiency in the glands and organs of the body.

Simha kriya is a useful practice for preventing and removing pharyngitis, laryngitis and general throat ailments.

What are the effects of cleansing the nasal passages with neti?

Swami Niranjanananda: Neti is for the head region. The benefits of neti are for problems related to the nose, eyes and ears. The nose is connected to many nerve endings. The optic nerves are connected with the visual area of the brain, the auditory nerves are connected with the hearing part of the brain, and the olfactory nerves with the sense of smell. All these nerves are located in and around the nostrils and the upper throat.

In the practice of neti, as the water goes through the mucous membrane, it touches all these nerve endings on its way and stimulates them, directly or indirectly. The temperature, force and flow of water stimulate them, causing many people in the initial stages of practising neti to feel tears come to their eyes. Neti removes the impurities, the dust and dirt that are absorbed by the membrane, the excess dryness or wetness, and provides a proper healthy structure to the membrane.

What is dhauti?

Swami Satyananda: Dhauti is the second kriya of hatha yoga. The word *dhauti* means 'to wash'. Techniques of dhauti are used to clean the alimentary canal, the inner walls of the stomach, intestines and bowel. There are also dhautis for cleaning the ears, eyes and teeth.

There are various ways of performing dhauti. When water is used, it is called *jala dhauti*. Sometimes cloth, air, or foodstuffs are also used for the cleaning. Dhauti must be practised under the guidance of a guru.

Why is dhauti such an important practice?

Swami Satyananda: The combination of all the practices of dhauti cleans the entire digestive tract and the respiratory tract. Dhauti removes excess and old bile, mucus and toxins, and restores the natural balance of the body's chemical composition, alleviating ailments caused by such imbalances. The various practices help remove infectious bacteria from the mouth, nose, eyes, ears, throat, stomach, intestines and anus.

The results are a reduction of excess fatty tissue and relief from flatulence, constipation, poor digestion and loss of appetite. Dhauti is even said to cure leprosy. Although this disease is not prevalent in many countries today, the point is that even such insidious diseases can be alleviated through this powerful practice. In *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (2:25) it states:

*Kaasashvaasapleehakushtham kapharogaashcha vinshatih;
Dhautikarmaprabhaavena prayaantyeva na samshayah.*

There is no doubt that coughs, asthma, diseases of the spleen, leprosy and twenty kinds of diseases caused by excess mucus are destroyed through the effects of dhauti karma.

Gheranda Samhita states that dhauti can cure abdominal ailments and fever. Of course, it is not advisable to practise dhauti during a fever or acute visceral infection. If practised after recuperation, however, dhauti can prevent recurrence of the problem.

What is hrid dhauti?

Swami Niranjanananda: *Hrid* means heart, *dhauti* means cleanliness. The heart region here includes the oesophagus, lungs and stomach. Cleansing the oesophagus is easy, even cleaning the stomach is simple, but cleaning the lungs is more complex. These practices are grouped under the heading of *hrid dhauti*.

The practice of hrid dhauti can be done in three ways. The first type is danda dhauti, which uses a *danda*, a stick made

from sugarcane, the stem of a banana tree, or a thin turmeric root. The second type is vaman dhauti, using water. The third type is vastra dhauti, which uses *vastra*, a piece of cloth.

These methods of hrid dhauti work by creating a vacuum in the chest so that kapha and impurities collected inside the lungs and windpipe can be expelled. They are listed in *Gheranda Samhita* (1:35):

Hriddhautim trividhaam kuryaaddandavamanavaasasaa.

There are three types of hrid dhauti: using a stick, regurgitating water, and using cloth.

Hrid dhauti, therefore, has these three practices. The first practice is danda dhauti, which is difficult, secret and not applicable to all. The second practice is vaman dhauti, which is of two types: jala vaman and anna vaman, known respectively as kunjral and vyaghra kriya. The third type of hrid dhauti is vastra dhauti, which is difficult but especially beneficial for the body.

RESEARCH INTO HATHA YOGA AS THERAPY

What are the origins of yoga therapy in the modern era?

Swami Satyananda: Since the 1960s, many doctors and scientists have researched yoga and its effects on the body. Before this, however, yoga asanas were seen as some sort of gymnastic exercises for the body and muscles. Due to this, the earlier teaching methods of yoga were very dynamic; they had speed and momentum. In the meantime, Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh, the guru of many swamis who introduced yoga around the globe, became a noted writer on yoga asana and pranayama in the 1940's.

The first book he printed was *Pranayama and Long Life; Yogasanas and Good Health*. That book was published by a large publishing house in India and circulated throughout the world. In that book Swami Sivananda indicated which asanas are good for which diseases. He introduced the idea

that yoga is not merely gymnastic exercises, but has a far reaching influence on the internal processes of the human body.

At first it was difficult for scientifically-minded people to accept this. How can asanas, pranayama and hatha yoga shatkarmas check 'incurable' diseases like asthma, diabetes and blood pressure; skin diseases like allergic dermatitis and psoriasis; peptic ulcers, duodenal ulcers, gastric ulcers; arthritis and rheumatism? In the beginning it was hard to believe. People did believe that exercises promote good health, but there was no scientific evidence as to how the asanas worked on the human body.

How did the Bihar School of Yoga become involved in research?

Swami Satyananda: Observing people in the ashram with chronic illness quickly recover when regular yoga practice was followed compelled me to instigate a series of studies on yoga. I contacted various authorities in India, Europe, America and Australia and inspired them to study these phenomena.

I helped one team to thoroughly examine the impact and effect of yoga postures on coronary disease, which was an important subject for me. I went to the central government in Delhi and met the ministers and other chief officers as the first endeavour to finance the project. They were very glad to do that, and granted a large sum of money and facilities in a medical college, along with permission to examine and instruct heart patients. They also gave an office, electrocardiograph and electroencephalograph facilities, and a yearly subsidy for recurring expenses. Eminent doctors followed these observations during a period of five years and examined more than 950 patients, men and women, with all kinds of coronary diseases including angina, thrombosis and myocardial infarction. The report was finally compiled and published before the Government of India.

Following this report on coronary disease, there was a great awakening in India. Many doctors began to attend yoga courses and the Bihar School of Yoga formulated a systematic course for the different types of diseases that affect the heart. As a result, in our ashrams all over the world, yoga therapy became one of the most important activities.

How did research into yoga therapy develop around the world?

Swami Niranjanananda: The period between the mid-seventies and the mid-eighties was a period of intense research into yoga. There were few institutions at that time conducting any kind of research; in fact, there were only two in all of India. One series of anatomical and physiological experiments was conducted by Swami Kuvalyananda in Kaivalyadham, Lonavala. It was purely physiological research. He would practise uddiyana bandha and have a CT image taken to show the position of the organs in that particular posture. In this manner, he tried to show the inner workings of the body, the position of the different organs of the body, and the possible outcome of postures. He then started his work on identifying the health benefits of postures.

At the same time, the Bihar School of Yoga started its research into yoga therapy. What are the effects of asana and pranayama, relaxation and meditation for developing and enhancing physical and mental health; how can asanas, which open and expand the chest, help asthmatic and restrictive respiratory conditions; whether a posture that affects the abdomen, liver, pancreas and kidneys can help in the management of diabetes, and so on.

In this manner, the Bihar School of Yoga started its research. During the 1970s, asthma, diabetes, skin diseases and many other physiological ailments were studied. The coordination of all this work was done entirely by Swami Satyananda, who sent teachers and sannyasins from the

Bihar School of Yoga to different medical centres, hospitals and research centres. They talked with the doctors, brought the groups together, conducted the training, conducted the tests and found the results. From the positive results that were discovered, books were written.

During the 1980s in America I was involved in research on different socio-psychological ills and problems such as drug addiction, alcohol addiction, and on psychiatric patients; programs were started in prisons, programs were started for drug rehabilitation. Many similar activities were also taking place in Australia. The sannyasins would go to prisons and teach yoga to the prisoners. The sannyasins would bring yoga techniques into their professional areas of medicine and psychiatry, to discover how yoga could help individuals and the community. In this manner, research became the main focus of the Bihar School of Yoga from the mid-seventies to mid-eighties. This was definitely the period of discovery, research, and achievements.

What studies have been done on yoga for the management of physical and mental disease?

Swami Niranjanananda: Various investigations have been carried out around the world to examine the efficacy of yoga. Experiments conducted on yoga therapy have shown that many physical illnesses can be managed effectively with simple yoga practices.

In Australia and the USA yoga was tested for the management of cancer; in New Zealand it was used in the management of psychiatric problems; in India, yoga was tested for managing diseases like diabetes, asthma and hypertension. In all these studies, yoga has proved to be a successful therapy. In America, a medical doctor experimented with using yoga to avoid heart bypass surgery. In England, some swamis have experimented with the management of AIDS; the results were most encouraging and satisfying.

In relation to yoga therapy, scientists and doctors are exploring the healing power of yoga. In many places yoga is

also being tested in relation to mental health, for example, for overcoming drug addiction, for overcoming the criminal mentality, for overcoming trauma, and to manage psychic imbalances. Such research is being successfully carried out in the USA, India and elsewhere.

How has research encouraged the uptake of yoga by medical authorities?

Swami Satyananda: During the 1960s and 70s studies covering a wide range of diseases were conducted all over India. Asthma, indigestion (the mother of many diseases), polio, muscular atrophy, multiple sclerosis (one of the widespread diseases in the West) and many other illnesses have been found to respond to yoga therapy.

In India, yoga has become one of the most important branches of healing. The Medical Association has asked the medical colleges to include the teaching of yoga therapy in medical studies. Medical doctors come to Bihar School of Yoga from all over India to learn the major principles of yoga therapy. There is research being done in Australia, Belgium, America and other countries into the effects of yoga therapy on diseases.

What does scientific research say about the general effect of asanas on the body?

Swami Niranjanananda: Clinical and scientific investigations done at Bihar School of Yoga and by scientists such as Dr Aleksandrowicz, T. Pasek and W. Romanowski in Poland, and M.A. Wenger and B.K. Bagchi in India, show that with the practice of asanas an aspirant has higher scores in the evaluation of autonomic balance and lowered sympathetic activity. Heartbeat, blood pressure and blood flow become synchronized and constant which helps to create a type of resonance in the involuntary body functions. Skeletal, muscular, endocrinal and nervous systems then respond in a highly sensitive manner to ensure proper function and maintain health.

What is the effect of asanas on physical tension?

Swami Satyananda: Tension means: muscular tension, mental tension and emotional tension. Muscular tension can be assessed and measured by instruments. The appliance is put on the body and the meter will say, 10, 20, 30, or 40. If a person lies down on their stomach, then raises the trunk of the body, as in *bhujangasana*, the cobra pose, it seems that the body is undergoing tension; however, when the assessing instruments are attached to the person practising *bhujangasana*, the tension drops. The tension was measured in this way in different postures.

First the person is asked to lie down and relax; almost 90% of tensions drop, 10% remain. If one remains in that posture for some time, it becomes 12%, 14%, 20%. An asana is then practised, followed by lying down on the back again. Each time a yoga asana is practised the instrument shows a remarkable drop in tension, bringing it down to 2%: that means 98% of tension is dropped.

From this, one fact can be understood: whenever yoga postures are practised, muscular tensions drop.

What evidence is there that shavasana helps manage hypertension?

Swami Niranjanananda: The cause of health problems is often understood when a person begins to develop internal awareness and starts observing tension that has accumulated over time.

In the 1960s Dr K.K. Datey carried out an experiment at K.E.M. Hospital in Bombay on the management of hypertension using *shavasana*, the pose of deep relaxation. Most of the patients had been under observation for two years



Shavasana

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while their medication was being stabilized. Any attempts at reducing the drug dosage had led to an increase in blood pressure. After practising shavasana for one month, more than half the patients showed a significant reduction in drug dosage and blood pressure. In the other half, those with evidence of hardening of the arteries showed no response, demonstrating the importance of early treatment. A significant proportion of the remainder had not practised shavasana properly and when they did, they also showed improvement. The majority, therefore, showed an improvement in symptoms and in their sense of wellbeing, indicating that the use of relaxation techniques such as shavasana can stabilize high blood pressure and reduce or eliminate medication.

There are four types of stress: nervous, muscular, cerebral and emotional. Nervous stress is very subtle. Muscular stress can be accumulated while simply sitting, without realizing there is tension in the shoulders or back. Sometimes the body's posture creates stress.

Cerebral stress is overworking the brain. Four main types of brainwaves are generated: beta, alpha, theta and delta, representing the different frequencies of electrical activity inside the brain at the time of action, relaxation and concentration. Beta waves are related to external activities. When driving a car, riding a bike, or working in the office, beta waves are predominant. Alpha waves are related to a relaxed, tension-free state. When one is sitting with nothing to worry about, sometimes alpha waves come. If one is focused, theta waves become predominant; this is the state of concentration. As one goes deeper into states of focused awareness, another frequency is generated, known as delta waves, which are slower and more introverting.

Cerebral tension is experienced when beta waves become hyperactive and there is no relaxation of this activity. The brain becomes tired and one just wants to relax. Sometimes there is sensitivity to sound, light and touch. Emotional stress, the fourth type of stress, occurs due to an underlying thought related to the family, to security or to fulfilment and satisfaction.

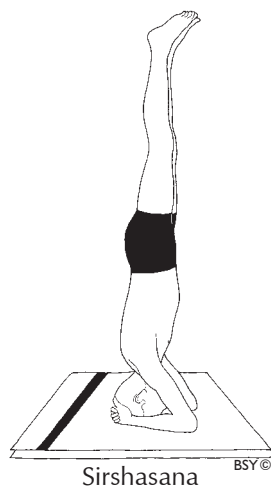
Dr Datey found that all four kinds of stress were balanced by practising shavasana. This example shows that many problems can be eliminated or avoided by simply deepening awareness of the body. For this reason yoga has been effective in managing many physiological and psychological disorders; the practices allow the body to move from a state of dis-ease, into a state of ease.

What has research on sirshasana, the headstand pose, shown?

Swami Satyananda: In 1966, a team of scientists conducted research on the yogic posture, *sirshasana*, the famous asana known as the headstand pose. They came up with some very positive results, proving that sirshasana can safely be used as a form of treatment for insomnia and deep anxiety.

Polish scientists and doctors have researched asanas and pranayama in general, but their research into the headstand pose is outstanding. The Polish scientists found that in the headstand pose, rich blood is supplied to the brain, repairing any damage. When practising the headstand, the consumption of oxygen is minimal. This means that by practising the headstand, oxygen, which is a necessary fuel for the body, is being saved. This is called 'fuel economy', spending less and less energy. It was also found that the respiration rate is reduced while in the headstand pose.

In conclusion, a team of scientists compiled an ambitious research report, the results showing that the headstand promotes a great change and improvement in the genito-ovarian system and renews a damaged heart. This was just a glimpse of the far-reaching effects.



How can the findings on sirshasana be used in daily life?

Swami Satyananda: Research on sirshasana has shown that it is a most important posture for the people of today who are thinking all the time, overexercising the brain and mind. The brain suffers due to thinking all the time. The consumption of oxygen by the brain is very great, and the body cannot manage it: it is like feeding an elephant with only a few kilograms of rice.

With each and every thought, something in the body is consumed. A tape recorder is run on batteries; when the tape recorder is running, it is consuming energy from the batteries. If the tape recorder is run ceaselessly for forty-eight hours, the batteries go flat. Exactly the same thing happens to us; many times our brain goes flat.

The energy in the brain needs to be replenished. In yoga, there are two methods for this: one is to supply energy to the brain and the other is to conserve the energy. By meditation, energy is conserved, just as energy is conserved in a battery for when it is needed. Does anyone know how to turn the brain on and off? People don't know how. Meditation is the method to conserve energy by turning the brain on and off, and sirshasana is the method to replenish the supply by influencing the blood supply and consumption of oxygen.

There is only one science in the world which teaches how to switch the brain on and off, and that is yoga. Every night when one goes to sleep, one forgets to switch off. The body is sleeping, but the tape recorder is on. The brain is working: it is consuming energy, it is consuming oxygen, it is pressurizing the heart, it is creating stress on the nervous system, as people do not know how to switch off the brain when it is not needed. This is what is taught in yoga – the direct method and the indirect method to switch off. First, switch off the brain; second, replenish the energy for the functioning of the brain.

YOGA AS A THERAPY

How does a scientific understanding of yoga contribute to yoga therapy?

Swami Satyananda: If yoga is understood as a system of gymnastics, the point is missed. If it is understood from the scientific point of view, the real point can be seen, as the practice of asanas and pranayamas has a deep effect on the most intricate principles of the human body.

To give an example: when a person is suffering from asthma, cortisone and adrenalin tablets are administered; if there is still trouble breathing, oxygen is given. The yogic treatment, however, is a comparatively simple matter of practising those postures which influence the adrenal glands. Adrenalin and cortisone are already in the body; there is an inexhaustible pharmacy within us. If, by yoga postures, the adrenalin and cortisone producing glands are influenced, the asthmatic trouble can be fixed. This is just one example of how yoga aims at the origin of illness to affect a cure.

How can yoga be integrated with other therapy systems?

Swami Satyananda: Practitioners of every healing system make the mistake of overstepping themselves. They recommend their method for an ailment which it cannot cure. This causes unnecessary suffering to patients through adopting an inadequate or unsuitable healing system for a particular disease.

The same criticism can be applied to yoga enthusiasts. Too often one asana is recommended as the certain treatment for an ailment. This misinformed approach is not only wasting the time of the patient, it is also cheating him, as well as giving yoga a bad name. The patient will tend to criticize yoga as a healing system when he gets no relief. It is therefore important in all systems, including yoga, that the expert knows the limitations of the system.

All systems have their place to help in the maintenance of good health. All systems should be seen as being part of the

spectrum of healing systems. The different systems should be unified so that barriers are broken down between them. In this way the best treatment for a given ailment is more likely to be prescribed. Let all systems be unified so that they can form one comprehensive system.

What range of disease conditions can yoga treat?

Swami Satyananda: Yoga may not cure a broken leg, but can help to prevent hernia. Yoga alone may not cure worms, but it can help to treat countless other ailments. It can treat all types of mental disorders, from which stem a large array of ailments. It can be used to treat cancer, polio, diabetes, constipation, asthma, high blood pressure, sexual malfunctions, anxiety, arthritis, backache, rheumatism, colds, coughs, epilepsy, varicose veins, piles, flatulence, migraine, pyorrhoea, sciatica, sinusitis, slipped disc, gastric ulcers, indigestion, insomnia, eczema and a multitude of other diseases. There are many authenticated cases of people who once suffered from some disease, removed it through regular yoga practices and now have perfect health.

How does yoga tackle disease?

Swami Satyananda: Yoga tackles diseases in the following manner:

- Massages and improves the efficiency of the internal organs through asanas
- Tones up the nerve connections by asanas
- Improves the blood circulation through asanas
- Improves respiration and the general vitality of the body through pranayama
- Cleans the body of impurities through asanas, pranayama and the shatkarmas such as jala neti, shankhaprakshalana, kunjla kriya
- Relaxes the mind and body through scientific relaxation techniques such as shavasana and yoga nidra

- Removes mental suppressions, phobias, neuroses, and all other negative aspects of the mind, bringing about greater happiness in life and removing many diseases.

Yoga methods simultaneously influence the body and the mind. It is for this reason that yoga methods are so effective in treating a wide range of diseases. Yoga techniques also maintain the body in good physical shape. In other words, yoga is good preventative medicine.

How successful is yoga in the treatment of disease?

Swami Satyananda: Yes, yoga treats diseases. Almost ninety percent of psychosomatic diseases are curable through the practices of yoga. This is the conclusion of the medical men; it is the conclusion of the scientists. I also know that the practices of yoga improve the mind and the brain, and can create a genius.

How does yoga cure disease?

Swami Niranjanananda: Yoga does not cure anyone. It is the individual who cures himself using the practices of yoga, thus bringing about a structure of balance and harmony in the total field of personality.

Why isn't classical yoga regarded as a therapy?

Swami Niranjanananda: The postures and breathing techniques help remove imbalances which cause illness and disease, but yoga is not a therapy and should not be considered as such. Yoga is a process for managing oneself, not the symptoms of a disease.

For example, a person with hypertension takes medicine to lower high blood pressure. As long as the medicine continues to be effective, the pressure stays down, but when the effect goes away the pressure again shoots up. Those with diabetes take insulin. These are not therapies that cure, but treatments which manage symptoms manifesting in the body. Yoga, however, does not manage symptoms. Yoga manages you. If one is able to lead a balanced life, these problems

leave naturally: yoga manages the person, not the disease. Therefore, yoga is not a therapy but a lifestyle. If one is willing to change and adopt that disciplined lifestyle, then one becomes a yogi.

What principles are hatha yoga therapy based on?

Swami Satyananda: Hatha yoga is a method of preparing the system for spiritual awakening but it is also an important science of health. Since ancient times hatha yoga has been used by yogis and rishis for the relief and elimination of all kinds of diseases and defects.

It is true that the practices require more time and effort on the part of the patient than conventional therapies, but in terms of permanent, positive results, as well as saving enormous expenditure on medicines, they are certainly more worthwhile. What makes this method of treatment so powerful and effective is the fact that it works according to the principles of harmony and unification, rather than diversity. The three important principles on which physical and mental therapy is based are as follows:

1. Conferring absolute health to one part or system of the body, thereby influencing the rest of the body.
2. Balancing the positive and negative energy poles e.g. ida and pingala, prana and apana.
3. Purifying the body of the three types of wastes, known as the *doshas*.

If there are fifteen grandfather clocks together on the same wall, all with pendulums of identical length and weight, after some time all the pendulums become synchronized in their movements. This occurs quite naturally according to the law of mutual rhythms and vibrations.

In the physical body, the various organs and systems each have their own functions to carry out, but there should be complete coordination between them. If any of the organs or systems of the body are not able to coordinate with each other, it means that not one but all the systems and organs are unbalanced. Thus, in any

sickness, whether physical or mental, every system is out of coordination.

According to the law of mutual rhythms, all one has to do in order to regain the health of the whole system is to bring one organ or system to a state of health. Then all the others will naturally follow suit. Ill health of one system creates ill health in the rest of the body. You cannot say that your stomach is bad and everything else is all right. Therefore, a sick person with a number of ailments should generally be given treatment for only one of them. If health can be created in one system of the body, gradually the whole body begins to improve. This is how hatha yoga therapy should be prescribed.

Most yoga teachers today, however, do not follow this system. Depending on their knowledge of medical diagnosis, they make a long list of practices – one for constipation, one for nosebleeds, one for something else. They think that by teaching a sick person various hatha yoga techniques for his different ailments, he will get better. Their system is based on the popular concept that various diseases belong to different groups, which does not take into account the interrelationship of all the organs and systems.

Conserving energy in this physical body is another important aspect of health which has been ignored by most of the healing sciences. So much importance has been given to nutrition, but the real source of energy, which is inherent, has been missed. This energy is something like positive and negative electrical charges pulsating throughout the body. The correct balance of these opposite forms of energy creates good health. Whenever these positive and negative flows are suppressed, blocked, dissipated or poorly distributed, disease inevitably results. The different organs and systems of the body do not subsist merely on food and vitamins. The main source of energy in life is these plus and minus, or positive and negative charges. Therefore, the science of physical and mental harmony is known as hatha yoga.

Physical and mental therapy is one of the most important achievements of hatha yoga. Hatha yoga has succeeded in diseases like asthma, diabetes and blood pressure where modern science has not. Besides this, hatha yoga has proved effective in cases of epilepsy, hysteria, rheumatism and many other ailments of a chronic and constitutional nature. Experience has shown that most diseases of a chronic and constitutional nature can definitely be reversed through hatha yoga.

The psychic and mental diseases which human beings are suffering from are nothing but a state of disharmony in the energetic system. In order to alleviate them one has to take a new look at the body and enlarge the dimension of modern medical science. There needs to be a redefinition of the body, the classification of disease and the system of diagnosis.

It is now being recognized that asanas and pranayamas are powerful and effective ways of controlling the whole body. They are the first steps in allowing one to not only alter the mechanisms of a single aspect, but to gain control over the total structure of the brain and mind, the controlling systems which allow one to direct every aspect of life and the energy within that.

How does yoga treat the different types of physical imbalance?

Swami Niranjanananda: In the yogic system various methods are given to overcome the physical causes of imbalance. It is said that for diseases caused by biological agents, such as micro-organisms or parasites, the shatkarmas should be practised.

It is possible to eliminate the poisons that accumulate in the body due to these biological agents in the following ways: i) by maintaining a state of physical purification through regular practice of shatkarma, ii) by taking a balanced diet to induce health, and iii) by awakening of certain chakras, like manipura. *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* even states that poisons from snake and scorpion bites can be neutralized with the

practice of the shatkarmas. Most of the yogic texts mention this benefit: this can be understood to mean that when the body reaches a state of total harmony and purification there is an automatic rejection of any foreign agent in the body, including that of a noxious chemical or poison.

Regarding climatic and environmental factors, yoga suggests common sense and choosing a place which is relatively free of pollutants for one's yogic practice. For trauma, such as chronic postural trauma, yoga suggests awareness of one's physical posture and the practice of asanas.

For abuse, addiction and medication, which are toxins, one can use various combinations of the shatkarmas along with asanas and bandhas.

Regarding nutritional imbalance, yogic theory states that the body has the capacity to produce its own minerals and chemicals for self-preservation. The food that is consumed, such as vegetables, fruits, lentils and grains is enough to sustain the body. In cases of illness, such as a cold, where the body requires an additional dose of vitamin C, it is better to depend on natural resources such as fruit, rather than taking vitamin C tablets. When vitamins or chemicals in the form of a tablet which has been mixed with other agents are taken, it reduces the body's capacity to produce its own supply. For this reason Ayurveda has been specific in describing the nutritional value of different items. One should be aware of the nutritional value of all foods and try to keep the diet as balanced as possible so that the body can maintain its natural balance.

Genetic traits and defects are difficult to overcome. It is only by faith and guru's grace that such defects can be removed. In 1986, a man came to the ashram suffering from hypertension. He asked Swami Satyananda what he should do about it. Sri Swamiji closed his eyes for a few minutes and said, "Stop all medication and practise the headstand for five minutes every day." We could not believe our ears. How could the headstand help a hypertensive condition? Logically it did not sound possible, but a month later the man turned up and said he was now perfectly all right.

When things like this happen, which go against normal expectations or logical, scientific concepts and techniques, what can it be due to other than God's grace or guru's grace?

What is the yogic view about natural and allopathic treatments?

Swami Niranjanananda: Regarding the treatment, one must decide for oneself. Natural remedies are definitely better as they do not create a state of physical imbalance, which tends to happen with medicines containing synthetic chemicals and hormones. Yoga prefers the use of natural remedies. However, sometimes natural remedies are slow to take effect, and if immediate relief from illness is needed, the allopathic medicines can help one through a critical situation. Other therapies which may have a slow but steady effect on the body can be tried simultaneously.

How does yoga complement modern medicine?

Swami Niranjanananda: Yoga represents that aspect of life in which one is able to develop a different perspective. Modern medicine is emergency medicine only. Those with diabetes take insulin to balance the sugar level in the body, but that does not cure the diabetes. Those with hypertension take tablets to lower the hypertension, but it does not remove the cause of the high blood pressure. It is just suppressing those symptoms that affect one's performance and functions. The causes that created those conditions in the first place have not been removed.

Yoga is not an emergency treatment. It does not suppress any condition. Rather it makes us aware of the cause that has created the psychological and mental distress leading to physical disease and illness. When modern medicine is complemented with yogic practices, balance can be attained.

How can yoga be combined with other therapies?

Swami Niranjanananda: Disease is caused by a condition of imbalance, either physical or psychological, plus the inability

to deal with this particular type of imbalance, whatever its cause. In order to attain total health, this state of imbalance has to be avoided.

If one is able to observe and understand one's own state of imbalance, then sound health can be attained by this process without the need of any type of therapy, whether it be homeopathy, naturopathy or yoga. Just by using common sense the state of imbalance and its symptoms can be prevented or cured.

Different therapies, whether naturopathy, homeopathy, allopathy or Ayurveda, tend to create another type of stress in the body in order to overcome an imbalance. Take homeopathy for example, the potency of the little medicines is one millionth of a millionth but still a chemical change is being created within the personality and the normal chemical composition of the body is affected. It may be minute, but there is a change. This also applies to other forms of therapy. If allopathy is used there is no limit to what type of change is brought about within the system, and this external stress on the normal functioning of the body will not be conducive to optimum health, even though it may help in overcoming the physiological disease or the psychological problem.

The state of depression or the state of hyperactivity is mental as well as physiological. If sleeping pills are taken in order to tranquillize the mind, it affects the nervous system, slowing down the sensory and motor impulses and deadening the brain so that instead of remaining hyperactive, relaxation is possible. But to do this, the normal performance of the nervous system is altered. If there is a cut or pain in any part of the body, a painkiller, or antibiotic can be taken; the positive and negative effects of drugs like these are well known.

Logically speaking, unless there is a chronic problem like asthma, one should avoid taking any sort of medication, whether it is homeopathic or allopathic. In order to reduce the intensity of an acute attack which can only be helped

immediately by allopathy or homeopathy, medication is taken, there is no harm in it. However, after taking it, one can go through some practices of asana and pranayama.

Yoga says that if the body can make itself ill, it also has the ability to cure itself. Here is an example which shows how the practice of yoga can help change the normal behaviour and imbalanced state of the body. Research was done in Australia and the United States on cancer, involving patients on whom the normal therapies had completely failed. Chemotherapy had failed. Operations had failed. Radiation had failed. Diet had failed. Everything had failed, and the doctors had virtually given a death certificate to the patients, a departure notice saying, "You will remain in this world for about six months. After that we cannot guarantee anything." At that stage, the patients began to practise yoga. They practised yoga nidra, pranayama and ajapa japa, no asanas. They were actually able to reverse the cancerous state, and today they are perfectly well and healthy; no-one would know they had had cancer.

This is a good example, as cancer is supposed to be one of the most dreaded and incurable ailments. If this example is looked at with an open mind, whether the cancer was cured through yoga or not, the fact remains that after all medication had failed, the simple practices of yoga nidra, pranayama, and ajapa japa helped overcome the chronic imbalance in the body.

The body has the energy to deal with any type of situation, no matter how difficult it may be. Of course, one must know the correct procedure, otherwise the problem may be aggravated. Yoga can definitely be used with other therapies, but in the long run all other therapies have to be left behind as one continues with yoga; yoga will develop the energy, the strength and the healing power of the body, rather than relying on external aid. Initially external aid may be used, but as health improves, other medicines or therapies can be stopped; just continue with yoga, and let the natural energy and healing power of the body develop.

One of the main aims of yoga is to provide balance and harmony between the systems of body, mind and spirit. However, when it comes to therapy, it should also be understood that initially one may have to take the help of interventionist therapies including allopathy, naturopathy and homeopathy to reduce the symptoms of a problem. Simultaneously one should continue with yoga practices which can eliminate the main cause of the problem. For example, if there is a tremendous stomach problem – constipation, diarrhoea, dysentery or even hernia, it can be alleviated with the help of other therapies in order to reach a point from which practices of yoga can help eradicate the problem. Similarly with asthma, the help of medication at the time of an attack may be required to ease the breathing, but after that the yoga practices of kunjal or vastra dhauti will help manage the condition.

In order for yoga therapy to be effective, the body should be free from excessive pain and suffering, maybe not one hundred percent but at least forty or fifty percent. It is not necessary for somebody to have a good understanding of the medical sciences, anatomy or physiology in order to approach yoga as a therapy, but it is necessary for the practitioner to have good common sense.

How does a yoga therapist decide on a treatment?

Swami Niranjanananda: Yoga therapy is simple because the principles are based on knowledge of the body. Two types of illness have been identified: diseases that begin in the body and are vital in nature, and diseases that begin in the mind and are psychic in nature. The treatment of these two types of illness is slightly different in yoga. First, the type of problem and which category it belongs to has to be identified. Does it belong to the body or does it belong to the mind? Some cases of cancer improve through the practice of yoga because the problem was mental – fear, anxiety, negative thinking. Once that root cause is eliminated, the healing slowly begins in the body. But then, there are some

cases in which the theory of mind over matter does not really work, either because the problem has intensified to such an extent that there is no reversing it, or due to not knowing how to use the power of mind over matter.

If the problem is physical, it can be dealt with through the practice of hatha yoga; if it is mental, raja yoga is used. Sometimes both have to be combined.

Some medical knowledge is needed in yoga therapy. If someone with diabetes does not know that the pancreas and liver and other parts are affected, a practice may be performed thinking that it will help, whereas it aggravates that problem. One may have diabetes and hypertension. The headstand is good for diabetes but for hypertension it is detrimental. This type of knowledge is necessary, but more importantly, knowledge of the actual physical state of the patient is required.

A yoga therapist has the big responsibility of making sure that the treatment is correct. It is not a question of trial and error. From the first stage, the therapist has to be sure which practice is beneficial for the disease.

What attitude is needed for success with yoga therapy?

Swami Niranjanananda: There is no question that medical science has made great advances with the purpose of helping mankind, yet it still seems to be in its infancy. Often chronic illness cannot be cured by medicine, it can only suppress the symptoms that manifest. Whether it is diabetes or hypertension, over time the effect of the medicine lessens as the body begins to adapt and become immune to the chemical changes.

At this stage some people decide to try yoga. They practise some asanas and pranayamas. There has been ample scientific research showing that balanced asana practice can help manage the most basic to the most life-threatening illnesses. For example, it has been shown that in forty days, non-insulin dependent diabetes can be managed with yoga. It has also been shown that respiratory disorders

such as bronchitis, asthma and eosinophilia can be managed through continued yoga practice.

However, one should not expect miracles from yoga. There is a statement in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* (1:14) in relation to *abhyasa*, or practice: *Sa tu dirghakala nairantaryasatkarasevito dridhabhoomih* – “practice should be for an extended period of time, with continuity, and the feeling of conviction and faith.” These three conditions will ensure there is a solid foundation for growth and development. When yoga practice is started, the imbalances of the body are automatically observed and transformed by the practitioner. This leads to true health.

How does yoga therapy work?

Swami Niranjanananda: When the neurocellular structure is changing, what is the first experience? The first experience is the state of relaxation. This is defined as the free flow of energy, “I feel relaxed”. There is a release of tension and blockage from the muscles and joints. The organs go into an active functional mode without any blockage or imbalance in them. This effect becomes a form of therapy.

Many investigations have been conducted which have proved that, in certain conditions, the practice of asana is helpful in the management of asthma, diabetes, hypertension, arthritis, digestive disorders, and even cancer. It was also shown that being HIV positive could be controlled through the practices of yoga. One HIV positive case became HIV negative after one year of yoga practice. This work with yoga and AIDS was done by yoga teachers in England.

Yoga is not a miracle cure for every problem, but under certain conditions it can work. If the timing is right, if the application is right, it will work. If the timing is wrong and the application is right, it is a lot of effort. If the timing is right and the application is wrong there is no result. So, both timing and application must be considered.

How is yoga therapy holistic?

Swami Niranjanananda: There are three aspects to a yoga practice in relation to health: curative, preventive and promotive; the main thrust of yoga is in the promotion of human health. This is not confined to the physical body alone but it is the total health of the human personality through physical, mental, emotional, intellectual, psychic and spiritual dimensions.

A good combination of the normal practices of yoga improve one's health. It is important that it is a good combination of practices; just hatha yoga is not enough, just raja yoga is not enough. A human being combines the qualities of head, heart and hands. The head represents rational, intellectual interaction. The heart represents emotions and the interaction of feelings and sensitivity. The hands represent the external interaction of body and mind with society and the cosmos. If one only concentrates on one aspect of life there is bound to be imbalance, so there should be a good combination of practices to improve the overall health of the human personality.

Can yoga therapy be misused?

Swami Niranjanananda: If someone with an ulcer or hernia reads in a book that the practices of shankhaprakshalana help to clean the stomach and intestines and they do it, what will be the result? Internal bleeding which will then show in the stool. Therefore, a person who is involved in yoga therapy should know its basic rule, which is first to reduce the amount of suffering and pain through the use of other therapies and then start the practice of yoga, which can again balance the system.

How does hatha yoga help manage chronic illness?

Swami Niranjanananda: The scope of yoga is vast. The hatha yoga system is for the elimination of toxins and impurities from the body. Hatha yoga practices remove the blockages and stiffness from the body. Balance in the performance

of the physical body, and harmony between the function of different organs and systems of the body, is the aim of hatha yoga. People who have used hatha yoga have found that these practices, the simple practices, give optimum health. Health is a stress-free condition of the body. Illness is a distressed condition of the body. When one suffers from either hypertension or insomnia, or if one develops physical problems like respiratory, cardiac or endocrinal problems, hatha yoga becomes an effective tool to intervene and manage those distressed conditions of the body.

Modern medicine is less than one hundred years old. The concept of medicine, emergency aid, started with the development of penicillin during World War II. Since then, the allopathic system has been a system of crisis management for the body. The allopathic systems recognize that medicine cannot regulate the levels of distress and imbalances of the body. For that, regulation of lifestyle is necessary.

For example, somebody has hypertension. Medication is taken to bring down the hypertension, but beyond that, what can be done? Every day a pill is taken, morning, noon and night to lower the blood pressure, but the strength and immunity of the body are not being developed to deal with the crisis. Somebody has a respiratory problem. They take a bronchial dilator spray to open up the wind passage and the lungs so that there is facility or ease in breathing, but the constriction comes back again after the effect of the medicine wears off. Does one need to depend all the time on bronchial dilator inhalers? Or can the ability of the body to breathe more freely be improved so that those emergency crisis management medicines are used less and less?

Many medical institutions and doctors are looking into the effects of yoga, as they realize that comprehensive help is not attained through pills, medications and vitamin tablets but by living a more balanced and regulated life. Therefore yoga, along with medication, becomes an effective tool to manage the distressful conditions that are encountered on a daily basis. When one's life has been regulated, the

medication can gradually be reduced and even stopped. The regulation of medicine happens because of the doctor and the regulation of one's life happens when one becomes aware of oneself. The hatha yoga systems, the practices, help one to become aware of one's body and be sensitive to its needs.

How can yoga therapy be used to prevent disease?

Swami Niranjanananda: The preventative aspect of yoga therapy is important; reach an optimal state of health now, through the practices, and avoid symptoms of stress and tension which can create an imbalance.

ASANAS IN YOGA THERAPY

What is the purpose of practising asanas?

Swami Sivananda: Without health how can one live? Without health, how can one earn a living? Without health how can one get success in yoga or any undertaking? Health is wealth. Good health is a valuable asset to one and all. It can be achieved by the regular practice of yoga asanas.

Asanas pertain to the physical body and nerve centres. They render the body firm and steady and eradicate physical ailments and inertia. The practitioner of asanas has an elastic spine, a supple body and a keen, vigorous appetite. Any trouble is removed from its starting point by the practice of asanas. Hatha yoga is not a goal; it is a means to an end.

What is the first aim of asanas?

Swami Niranjanananda: The first aim of asanas is relief from physical and mental distress. Asanas create temporary tension in the body, stimulating the elimination of toxins, making the joints flexible and improving the health of the muscles. They also bring about coordination in the functioning of the nervous system and increase the efficiency of the internal organs due to their light massaging effect. Thus, with regular practice of asanas, the body gradually becomes healthier.

Why are asanas the ideal system of physical culture?

Swami Sivananda: It is important to know what an ideal system of physical culture should be, so that the value of yogasanas can be judged in the light of the ideal. An ideal system is that which requires the smallest amount of energy to be spent in order to secure the greatest amount of benefit. It can effect a maximum increase in the vital index, build up a healthy nervous system, ensure health for the excretory organs of the body, take care of the circulatory system, and also develop the muscular system. All these conditions are fulfilled by yogasanas.

What is the difference in the effect of asanas and exercises on health?

Swami Satyananda: Yoga postures are thought to be exercises in the West, but all the research concludes that they are not exercises; the body may be moving but it can't be said that they are exercises.

What is the difference? It has been found that during yoga postures the consumption of oxygen in the body is minimum, which is not the case with physical exercises. During yoga postures the respiratory rate falls; consequently there is minimum pressure exerted on the coronary system, which is definitely not true with physical exercises.

Also, the way asanas are done has much more to do with the nervous system and intra-organic processes than with muscles. During certain yoga postures hormones are secreted and circulated in the blood vessels; for example, some practices have a special relationship with the adrenal glands while other postures have a direct relationship with the thyroid or pancreas. In relation to the nervous system, there are yoga postures which maintain a balance between the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems; as a result of this balance many psychosomatic illnesses are easily resolved.

Therefore these yoga practices are considered to be postures, not exercises.

Why are asanas so beneficial for health?

Swami Sivananda: The practice of asanas controls the emotions, produces mental peace, distributes prana evenly throughout the body and different systems, and helps maintain healthy functioning of the internal organs.

Physical exercises draw the *prana*, energy, out, but the asanas send the prana in. The practice of asanas cures many diseases and awakens kundalini shakti. These are the chief advantages in the yogic system, which no other system has.

What is the effect of asanas on health?

Swami Niranjanananda: The concept of health in yoga is having a body which is free from tension, stress and disease. Regardless of what one's body looks like – whether it is thin or fat, young or old – the dynamic group of asanas provide the body with this type of true health.

What are the general physical and psychological benefits of practising asana?

Swami Satyananda: Daily practice of yoga asanas reduces tensions of the muscles and nerve centres in the body. It rectifies and improves the digestive system. It throws away lethargy and laziness and keeps one active and efficient all day.

When the body and mind are light and free from tensions, more physical and mental work can be done. Asanas guard against inner disorders of the body, and provide strength and health. Asanas take care of the liver, digestion and diseases pertaining to blood. It is the view of yogis and many psychologists that mental diseases like neurosis, neurasthenia, insomnia, etc., can be cured by yoga asanas.

When different yoga asanas are practised, decay of the body and mind are kept at bay. Asanas keep one young, with complete equilibrium of body and mind. Tensions have to be faced everywhere, in all spheres of life, because the world is full of tensions. Through yoga therapy, particularly asanas, the body and mind are kept in tune, in coordination.

Along with sound physical health, perfect mental equilibrium and steadiness, which are the natural outcome of asanas, are equally important. Yoga practices correct the mental personality very quickly. For example: short temper, anger, mental agitation, mental depression, unsatisfied nature and other mental complexes.

This is a gradual process which is sped up by regular practice. Mental capacities increase, and the mind gradually becomes sound, steady and subtle. Yoga has given definite positive results to millions; that is the secret behind its continuity and flourishing, in spite of major historical changes over thousands of years.

What is the difference between the general practice of asanas and their use in yoga therapy?

Swami Niranjanananda: Yoga therapy is different to yoga practice. For example, in asana practice as a general rule the principle of counterpose is used. This means that for every forward bend, a backward bend is practised; for every inverted posture, a vertical posture is practised, so that physical balance is maintained. However, if one has a respiratory problem the recommended asanas are the backward bending asanas, which expand the chest. If one has a digestive problem, whether constipation, diarrhoea, dysentery, indigestion, diabetes or excessive gas, forward bending asanas are recommended due to their compression of the internal organs.

When practising hatha yoga to improve one's health, this is the role of asanas. In the restoration of health there are preparatory stages which can restore at least fifty percent of health without attempting any other difficult techniques of yoga.

What are the main benefits of practising asanas?

Swami Niranjanananda: Asanas have four major benefits: i) the internal biorhythms are harmonized; ii) the pranic energy in one's system is regulated; iii) the blockages and

tensions in different muscles are removed; iv) they create harmony in the performance of the sympathetic and parasympathetic activities of the body. There are many other benefits, but these are the four main ones.

How does asana practice make the body healthy?

Swami Niranjanananda: There are different systems of yoga. One branch of yoga is hatha yoga, which is the physical component of yoga, including the practice of physical postures called asanas. Asanas work at the physical level, stretching and toning the body. When the body is toned and the systems are working in harmony with each other, physical efficiency increases one hundredfold.

There are many different kinds of postures. What is their aim, what are they meant for? The postures or asanas are classified into groups. One group releases pressure, or tensions and tightness from the body. Another group directly influences and affects the internal organs of the body. Another group releases the energy blocks from different parts of the body. Another group is used in healing the body. There are a wide variety of postures or physical movements that can be done by the individual.

Numerous studies have been conducted around the world, proving that many physical problems, illnesses and diseases can be managed through yoga. Respiratory problems, circulatory problems and digestive problems can be effectively managed through yoga. People are now working on auto-immune deficiencies and have found that when the postures are performed, they alter the behaviour of the organ which is affected.

Sometimes a change can happen in the body which is similar to a miracle. Of course, it is not a miracle, it is just the body regaining its health and wellbeing. Take, for example, diabetes, in which glucose is not absorbed by the body and insulin is not produced in the body. Medical research has shown that through the practice of asanas it is possible to correct this state. Similarly, yoga asanas have

been found beneficial in remedying various specific physical disorders.

There is also the general toning and enhancing of physical abilities. Yoga believes that as the muscular and nervous blocks are relieved, the body is revitalized. This has been the subjective experience of many people who practise yoga. The feeling of energy, the feeling of stamina, the ability to control the tiredness of the body by controlling the breath, the ability to bring down the heartbeat, hypertension and the hyperactivity of the brain through breath regulation, to sharpen the senses so as to optimize performance; these are some of the outcomes of the physical postural practices.

How do asanas keep all the systems of the body in a healthy condition?

Swami Sivananda: The three major organs, the heart, lungs and brain, and the cerebro-spinal system, are kept in a healthy condition by the regular practice of asanas. The heart, the lungs and also the other organs are all stimulated or retarded through nerves that proceed from the brain and the spinal cord. The spinal cord is toned by asanas and the circulation of blood in the arteries and veins is kept in proper order by their practice. This means there is no stagnation of blood in any part of the body and the development of arteriosclerosis or hardening of the arteries is prevented. The practice of asanas lubricates the whole bodily system.

How do asanas remove disease?

Swami Niranjanananda: In the classical hatha yoga texts at the end of the description of each asana, it is usually stated that practising it removes diseases. Even if it is understood that the practice of these static asanas brings the mental benefits of a peaceful mind and a reduction in thoughts and internal excitement, doubts may remain about the removal of physical ailments. Therefore, it needs to be understood how yoga works to overcome disease.

Diseases which originate in the body and then influence the mind are called somopsychic diseases. They may be due to bacteria or external impurities entering the body. Diseases which originate in the mind and then influence the body are called psychosomatic diseases. Diseases are therefore of two types and, according to yoga, eighty percent of physical diseases originate in the mind.

According to this principle, when the mind is peaceful and stable, when it is calm and no longer excited, when internal tension and affliction are absent, there is also an effect on the body. The body automatically starts to become more controlled and balanced.

Modern scientific medicine tends to treat the symptoms of a disease. Headache is a symptom, not a disease. Taking a painkilling tablet such as Aspirin cures the symptom, not the cause. Asthma is also a symptom. Taking medicine or spraying a bronchodilator expands the airways for a while, but the disease remains and is not rooted out. Diabetes is also a symptom. In diabetes the pancreas is not producing sufficient insulin. The insulin can be replaced by injection, but this does not correct the functioning of the pancreas.

It has often been observed that yogic practices heal many physical diseases. With the practice of yoga nidra, the body and *antahkarana*, the inner apparatus consisting of ego, intellect, memory and thought, attains a state of rest. Tension, worries and distress are removed. Japa increases self-confidence. Pranayama enhances the immune power of the body and balances the pranas.

Yoga uses these principles for treatment. Often it may appear that the practices which are prescribed could aggravate a disease, but those practices leave a positive effect on the mind, brain, nervous system and endocrine glands, enabling them to function properly.

It is believed that if the body becomes stable, the mind becomes steady, and that stability of the mind influences the body. Daily practice establishes and regulates the healthy at-ease state of the body and mind in which dis-ease is

eradicated. That is why for almost every asana it is said, *sarva vyaadhi vinaashakam* – all diseases are destroyed.

Do certain asanas influence specific parts of the body?

Swami Satyananda: Certain postures such as *bhujangasana*, cobra pose, *shalabhasana*, locust pose, *sarvangasana*, shoulder stand pose, and *matsyasana*, fish pose, are maintained for a minute or so when practised. During this time the endocrine glands in the body are stimulated and balanced. The practice of asanas has a strong influence on the endocrine secretions. When these glands start working efficiently, a state of balance is created in the body, resulting in the removal of many diseases.

Each asana has its own specific effect on the body. *Bhujangasana*, for example, is good for the liver and spine; *sarvangasana* is good for the thyroid and the abdomen; *halasana* together with *paschimottanasana* influences the pancreatic glands; *garudasana* is good for strengthening the ligaments of the whole body. There are certain asanas which improve eyesight, others improve digestive power, and there are those which improve memory. Some asanas increase height and weight and others bring control to the mind.

Are asanas more effective at curing disorders or preventing them?

Swami Sivananda: The asanas are preventive and curative. That is the beauty of this system. Some exercises move the body forward and backward, while others help with the lateral movement of the spine. Thus the body as a whole is developed, toned and strengthened. A whole practice session can be finished in fifteen minutes. Within this short period the maximum benefits can be realized, with all the organs of the body toned and exercised.

The practitioner of hatha yoga is agile and nimble, with an elastic spine, supple body and a keen vigorous appetite. Any trouble is removed at its starting point by the practice of asanas. This system is simple, exact, efficacious, economical time-wise and suitable for self-practise in the home.

How do asanas help prevent disease?

Swami Satyananda: Mental problems or tension, as well as an unhealthy body, are the prime cause of most diseases which afflict mankind. The body, however, has remarkable powers to heal itself, and through the immune system has great strength to naturally resist the onset of disease. A body that is unhealthy and a mind that is tense tend to whittle away these powers, making the body more vulnerable to illness. Asanas help the body to resist disease by bringing the mind and body into the best possible condition.

A body saturated with poisons and toxins is a breeding ground for germs and is conducive to attack by disease. Asanas help purify the body and thereby prevent diseases occurring. Some ailments are caused by malfunctioning of internal organs: blood pressure, heart attack, diabetes and so on. Asanas prevent this happening by bringing all the relevant organs into good working condition, improving nerve connections and also by reducing chronic mental stress, the latter being the root cause of most of the problems in the first place.

How do asanas help rectify the physical imbalances caused by daily life?

Swami Niranjanananda: One aspect of hatha yoga is its physical effect. This physical effect is used to help harmonize the body and bring awareness of the different imbalances within the physical structure. It is these imbalances which cause various types of stress and tension. Muscular and physical stress cause a state of imbalance which in turn results in various aches and pains, psychosomatic and somopsychic disorders, as the harmony of the body is distorted.

For example, how many types of physical movement does a person go through in an average day? When sitting in a chair; the body is bent. When sitting on the floor, the body is bent. When sitting on the bed, the body is bent. Most physical movements during the waking state create a

lot of physical tension. How many times is the body actually stretched? How many times is traction actually provided to the body during the day? Very few. How many times is the body twisted in a controlled way without any jerking? Very few. How many times is a conscious effort made to curve the body backward? Very rarely. Apart from sleeping flat in bed, the majority of time is spent in a forward bend posture. This posture creates tension.

Such imbalance creates a distortion in the functioning of the internal organs and systems. The digestive system is definitely affected, unless the digestive tract is very powerful. The physical aspect of yoga aims to eliminate this imbalance by prescribing various postures or asanas. Asanas are smooth, controlled movements which are done slowly and with awareness, to provide the maximum stretch to the body in every direction.

Apart from the physical structure of the body, different levels of energy are experienced. At the time of waking one feels fresh and energetic. By the end of the day one feels down, low on energy, tired. If some rest is taken and the body is able to recuperate, the level of energy goes up, the state of tiredness goes away and the feeling improves. So the level of energy also increases with the state of physical relaxation and decreases when the body is in the state of tension.

This means that when the physical aspect of yoga in the form of asanas is practised by stretching the body in different directions, the muscle structure is also being relaxed. It is like a general tuning, benefiting the tissues, bones and nervous system, and massaging internal organs like the liver, kidneys, intestines and stomach. In this way the whole body can be brought to a state of balance. Some people are able to do it, some people are not able to do it, but this is the aim.

Does asana practice create change at the neurocellular level?

Swami Niranjanananda: Over time, the awareness which is gained through the practice of yoga becomes a natural,

spontaneous part of one's nature and life. This process reflects a change in the neurocellular structure of the physical body. When an asana or posture is practised, what is actually happening in the body, what is the actual effect of the asana? At the neurocellular and neuromuscular level, the body is being altered.

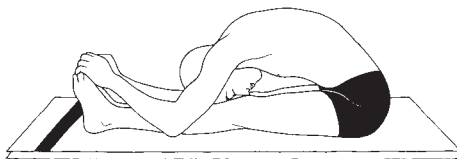
This alteration of the body is not felt externally: the person remains the same, but the cells and the muscles are being transformed. Whether the practice is pawanmuktasana, dynamic postures such as surya namaskara, intermediate postures, balancing, or advanced postures like *sirshasana*, headstand, *mayurasana*, peacock or *vrishchikasana*, scorpion, all these different types of asanas actually transform the neurocellular structure of the body.

What are the health benefits of paschimottanasana?

Swami Sivananda: This is an excellent asana. Books on hatha yoga speak highly of this asana.

It makes the breath flow through the sushumna and rouses the gastric fire. It reduces fat in the abdomen. It is specifically recommended for corpulence or obesity and for enlargement of the spleen and liver. Sarvangasana is for the stimulation of the endocrine glands and paschimottanasana is for the stimulation of the abdominal viscera, such as kidneys, liver, pancreas, etc. It increases peristalsis of the bowels. This asana relieves constipation, removes sluggishness of the liver, dyspepsia, belching and gastritis.

Lumbago or stiff back and all sorts of myalgia and other diseases of the back muscles are cured. The hip, the muscles of the abdomen, the solar plexus of nerves, the epigastric plexus of nerves, bladder, prostate, lumbar nerves and



Paschimottanasana

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sympathetic cord are all toned and kept in a healthy, sound condition.

Thanks to paschimottanasana and to the rishis who first introduced these wonderful asanas to the students of hatha yoga!

What are the general effects of inverted asanas?

Swami Satyananda: Inverted asanas reverse the action of gravity on the body; instead of everything being pulled towards the feet, the orientation shifts towards the head. Similarly, on the emotional and psychic levels, inverted asanas change the normal patterns, throwing a new light on old patterns of behaviour and being.

Generally, these practices are refreshing and revitalizing. They improve health, reduce anxiety and stress, and increase self confidence. They also increase mental power, concentration, and the capacity to sustain large workloads without strain. Inverted asanas nourish the neurones and flush out toxins. Blood and lymph, accumulated in the lower limbs, pelvis and abdomen, are drained back to the heart, then circulated to the lungs, purified and recirculated to all parts of the body. This process nourishes the cells of the whole human organism. The enriched blood flow also allows the pituitary gland to operate more efficiently, tuning the entire endocrine system. This has a positive effect on the metabolic processes and even on ways of thinking.

AMAROLI

What is the history of amaroli?

Swami Satyananda: Many ancient and tested traditional systems have praised the benefits of amaroli. In tantra there is one whole text devoted to it. The text is called the *Damara Tantra* and the process is called shivambu kalpa vidhi. The word *shivambu* has various meanings; in this context, it means ‘urine’; the word *kalpa* here means ‘to change’, or ‘to revitalize’ and *vidhi* means ‘process’ or ‘technique’.

Therefore, *shivambu kalpa vidhi* can be translated as ‘the practice of using urine to regenerate the body’.

There are 108 verses devoted entirely to amaroli. It is suggested that the urine be either taken alone or with various types of herbs. Three verses summarize the whole process:

A sensible man gets up early in the morning when three quarters of the night has passed (about 3 or 4 o'clock), faces the east and passes urine. (v. 6)

The initial and concluding flow of urine is to be discarded. The intermediate flow is to be consumed. This is the most suitable method. (v. 7)

One should take one's own urine. The mouth and tail of a snake contain poison. In the same way, the first and last portion of flow tend to be unwholesome. This is widely accepted. (v. 8)

The whole process is solemnly explained to Parvati by her husband Lord Shiva.

In *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (3:96) it says:

*Pittolbanatvaatprathamambudhaaraam vihaaya
nihsaaratayaantyadhaaraam.
Nishevryate sheetalamadhyadhaaraa kaapaalike
khandamate'marolee.*

According to the Kapalika sect, amaroli is practised by drinking the cool midstream of urine. The first part of the urine is left as it contains bile and the last part is left as it does not contain goodness.

There are many more ancient references. Amaroli is widely mentioned in Ayurvedic texts such as the *Susruta*. There is nothing new about drinking urine.

What is urine?

Swami Satyananda: One of the prime functions of the kidneys is to maintain the fluid balance of the body. That is, the body

must be kept at a reasonably fixed level of alkalinity (pH); to do this the kidneys remove acid from the body. This occurs especially after meals. Associated with this elimination are various other constituents, one of which is ammonia. It is the ammonia in urine that some people object to, as it is poisonous in certain quantities. However, in the amounts that the body produces, especially from a vegetarian low-protein diet, it is not a problem.

The contents of urine are: urea, creatinine (protein), uric acid, amino nitrogens, ammonia, sodium, potassium, calcium, magnesium, chloride compounds, sulphate compounds (organic and inorganic), enzymes, hormones, and trace elements.

It contains various other constituents, the amount and concentration of which depends on diet and health. Most of these materials are essential substances for maintaining the body and can be recycled. This is one of the reasons why amaroli may give so many benefits.

How can amaroli be used externally?

Swami Satyananda: Many people wash themselves thoroughly with urine every morning. After a minute or so it is washed off with water. The effect is to remove inlaid dirt, grease and toxins from the skin. It has an osmotic and solvent action which draws out impurities. This is aided by the warmth of urine opening the pores of the skin; the body produces its own hot water, why not use it? At the same time, salts from the urine are taken in through the pores of the skin, replacing lost salts.

Anyone who has cuts, grazes, sores or similar open wounds can use urine as a disinfectant. Not only does it keep the wound clean and free from infection, but it also speeds up healing. When suffering from boils, pimples or fungal infections such as athlete's foot, urine can be used as a means of drawing out the underlying impurities. It can be used on burns and scalds as a method of disinfecting and drying up the weeping sore. This also applies to blisters. It is said that a

mixture of urine, ginger and salt rapidly removes ringworm and eczema. It is also useful for alleviating mosquito and other similar insect bites. All these points make regular washing with urine a worthwhile habit.

People suffering from measles, chickenpox and similar ailments can bathe in their own urine. Alternatively urine packs can be used. Urine packs can be kept on wounds, boils, lumps and swollen areas of the body for prolonged periods of time. For small burns, ice or cold water is recommended, but for larger burns urine packs should be kept on for short durations. The pack should consist of a folded cloth soaked in warm urine. These packs can also be used for certain internal diseases.

Urine can be used with massage. This applies to a full treatment of massage as well as massage during one's daily bath. The massage should be directed towards the heart to stimulate the return flow of blood to the heart. This massage stimulates the local blood circulation, removes toxins and squeezes impurities out of the skin.

How is amaroli used internally?

Swami Satyananda: There are some people who praise and worship amaroli, claiming urine to be the divine nectar of life. Ardent supporters give a long list of diseases which can be treated with urine, including diabetes, kidney diseases, heart ailments, high blood pressure, oedema, malaria, general fevers, colds, asthma, menstrual disorders, piles, intestinal diseases, cancer and many more. Sufferers from any of these diseases have nothing to lose and everything to gain by trying amaroli. If possible, a doctor or nature healer who has empathy with amaroli should be consulted for advice on the best method for the particular condition. Amaroli can be used for both chronic and acute diseases, but in the case of acute disease, such as gastroenteritis, it should be used as an adjunct to conventional therapies.

Those people who have read the topic on shankha-prakshalana will appreciate the similarity between the salty

water used in that practice and salty urine. The salt content of urine varies greatly. The first flow of urine in the morning is about two to four times more concentrated than urine passed in the daytime. This solution is hypertonic (that is, containing more salt than normal body fluid). Under these circumstances, the osmotic pressure may draw water out of the body into the intestines. This flushes the system and has many beneficial repercussions. This directly helps to relieve constipation and indirectly other common ailments.

Depending on the diet, the amount of salt in the diet and the amount of water consumed, daytime urine tends to be hypotonic (that is, containing less salt than the body fluid) or isotonic (containing the same quantity of salt as the body fluid). The urine will be hypotonic if sufficient water is consumed. This urine will be quickly absorbed into the blood to flush the kidneys, muscles, etc.

What are the main benefits of amaroli?

Swami Satyananda: Many people in the ashram practise amaroli. All the people who have been practising amaroli have given astounding, unbelievable reports, and say, “We never think about disease at all!” The stories they tell are amazing. I have also seen the effects of amaroli on cancer patients and I have not yet seen any failures. Since 1943, right up to 1978, I have never seen bad results from the use of amaroli. Just recently a very ill gentleman approached me and asked my opinion on amaroli. I suggested that he try it for himself and see what happens. Now, two months later, he has recovered completely.

For centuries amaroli has been used, not only for fighting disease, but also for creating the situation for samadhi and tantric achievement. One thing I am sure about amaroli – it helps control the fluctuations of the mind.

3

The Nervous and Endocrine Systems in Hatha Yoga

IMPORTANCE IN HEALTH

Why does hatha yoga have such a powerful therapeutic effect?

Swami Satyananda: Yoga therapy works on the premise that the hatha yoga shatkarmas, asanas, pranayamas, relaxation and other practices can regulate the proportion of hormones within the body, including steroids, as well as rebalancing the autonomic nervous system via its effect on the central controlling structures of the brain.

Why is the effect of asanas on the endocrine system so significant?

Swami Satyananda: The major asanas are powerful due to their influence on the endocrine system, which maintains order in the physical body. Endocrinal imbalance generates sickness.

The endocrine system consists of various glands located throughout the body which secrete special substances called hormones. Each of these hormones has a specific function to perform in the body: they act as triggers which prompt the various organs into higher or lower levels of activity as required, or in some cases, such as the women's menstrual cycle, they initiate and terminate various processes. These hormones also interact with and modify each other's

activities. For optimum health the entire system must be in balance and perfectly coordinated, each gland secreting the required hormone in the right quantity at the right time. If there is disharmony in the endocrinal system there will be a malfunction in one or more of the bodily processes and possibly in the emotional makeup of one's personality. There is such an intricate relationship between the various glands that one malfunctioning gland can cause disruption to the whole system.

Asanas are designed to rectify overactivity or sluggishness of individual glands as well as harmonize the control centre of the system in the brain. This is why even simple asanas can sometimes bring about astonishingly quick benefits.

Endocrinal disorders are not usually organic – they are generally functional. In other words, the individual glands are capable of working correctly but don't, perhaps due to stress or misuse of the body. This can be compared to a car. If the petrol mixture is too rich, or the air and petrol intake pipes are blocked, the car will cease to work or will not run smoothly, although it still has the capacity to work properly when the necessary adjustments are made. With the endocrine system the functional breakdown may be due to ineffective nerve impulses or insufficient supply of oxygenated blood, perhaps due to incorrect breathing. Asanas automatically and gently rectify this condition, bringing the system into proper working order again.

What is the role of the nervous system in health and disease?

Swami Satyananda: Imbalance in the nervous system is an important factor involved in bringing about disease. This may be in the autonomic, sympathetic or parasympathetic nervous system. In daily life the sympathetic and parasympathetic are of more relevance. If there is any major imbalance in these two lines, there is a real problem. These nervous systems are also responsible for controlling and regulating the endocrine system.

If one of the nervous systems is suppressed by fear, anxiety, passion, stress, strain, malnutrition, or any of the emotional problems that people face today, the parasympathetic nervous system can be blocked.

This, in turn, can affect organs, such as the pancreas. This large gland secretes many fluids, the most important of which is insulin, responsible for balancing sugar assimilation. If there is any imbalance in the secretion of insulin, sugar assimilation is not properly regulated, and most of it is expelled. That results in what is called diabetes. It is the parasympathetic nervous system which is responsible for creating a block in the pancreas. By overeating and not doing any physical exercise, or if one is under constant stress and strain, the parasympathetic nervous system becomes underactive; its normal functioning becomes obstructed. As a result it is unable to send impulses to the pancreas and the pancreas does not produce insulin. Once the parasympathetic nervous system is blocked and the impulses do not travel through it, naturally the pancreas does not produce enough insulin, as the very communication line, the parasympathetic nervous system, is not functioning.

If some of the asanas, such as paschimottanasana are practised, the parasympathetic nervous system will be revived. It will feel as if there is no diabetes at all. It's not a miracle.

What is the connection between the pineal gland, ajna chakra and health?

Swami Satyananda: In yoga there is a strong emphasis placed on the development of ajna chakra. Ajna can be developed by concentration on the eyebrow centre, which is known as shambhavi mudra. Ajna can also be developed through *trataka*.

If one can learn to handle ajna chakra properly, all the systems in the body can be controlled: the nervous system, endocrine, respiratory, circulatory, digestive and

excretory systems, everything can be managed. Of course, one does asana, pranayama, mudra, bandha, meditation, concentration and relaxation, but the main and most important point is that one learns to master this gland called the pineal, which is the seat of ajna chakra.

A simple analogy will help make it clearer. The pituitary gland is the disciple and the pineal gland is the guru; this should be the relationship. As long as this relationship is abiding, everything is all right, but when the pineal gland becomes subservient to the pituitary, there will be emotional, mental, psychic and physical problems: thyroid overacting or underacting, adrenals overacting or underacting, metabolism totally out of balance, and no one knowing exactly what is happening. One takes drug after drug: antibiotics, sedatives, tranquillizers. Doctors do not know exactly what is wrong either, as they are only taught to treat this body as bone, marrow, blood and flesh. They are unable to deal with diseases at a subtler level.

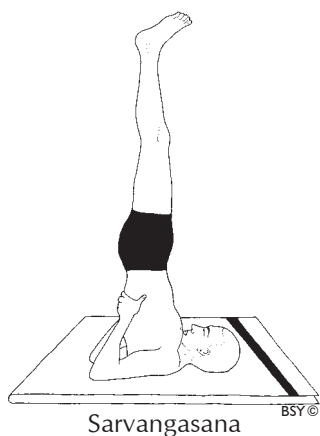
Whether it is heart attack, diabetes, blood pressure or rheumatism, whatever it is, understand that it has something to do with the pineal gland, the ajna chakra. When ajna chakra can be handled, that sickness can be handled. When one concentrates on the mid-eyebrow centre, it is not just a psychic practice. It is a psychic practice but it involves all the systems of the body.

In yoga, the body is considered as a manifestation of two basic energies: mind and prana. To maintain a balance between these two, the pineal gland should be strengthened by concentration on ajna chakra.

THE EFFECT OF ASANAS

What is the effect of sarvangasana on the nervous system?

Swami Satyananda: Sarvangasana influences the brain, but not as much as sirshasana. The enriched blood supply to the neck region, however, has a particularly beneficial stimulating and regulating effect on the cervical



Sarvangasana

spinal cord, which is encased by the vertebral column, and the eight cervical spinal nerves which branch out from the spinal cord in this region. These nerves innervate the muscles of the neck, face, the upper trunk and arms through a group of nerves which also innervate the diaphragm, thereby having an important influence on respiration. Sarvangasana helps to ensure smooth nervous activity of these parts of the body.

Also arising in the region of the neck are various nerves forming part of the parasympathetic nervous system. This is part of the autonomic nervous system and partly controls the functioning of the internal organs connected with blood circulation and digestion. Sarvangasana stimulates these nerves, improving the associated functions.

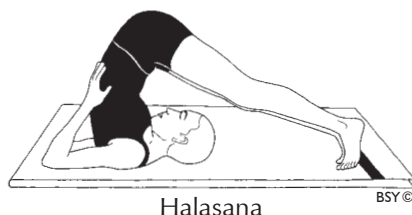
In what ways does practising sirshasana benefit the brain?

Swami Satyananda: Sirshasana gives many benefits. Often the influence is more subtle or indirect; as such it is difficult to attribute effects directly to sirshasana. Practice improves the sense of balance and helps to relieve neurasthenia (caused by malfunctioning of certain nervous centres in the brain). Memory power, intellect, concentration, etc., are all mental functions, yet they are expressed through the brain.

What is the effect of halasana on the nervous system?

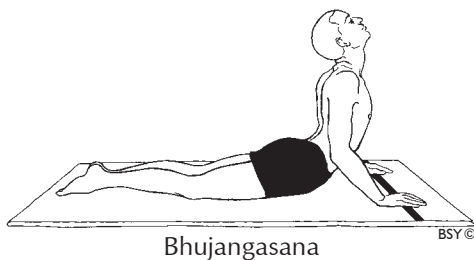
Swami Satyananda: Halasana squeezes stagnant blood from the back region, encouraging a rich supply of purified blood to the back when the asana is complete. The improved supply of nourishment to this area improves the operation of the nerves of the spinal cord and the sympathetic nervous system, which runs beside the spine and innervates the

internal organs of the body. The overall result is a general revitalization of the nervous system and its associated functions.



How does practising bhujangasana benefit the nervous system?

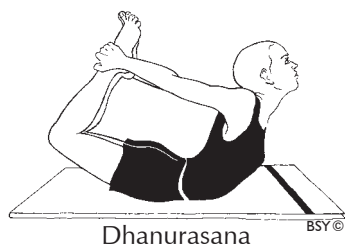
Swami Niranjanananda: Research has shown that bhujangasana strengthens the nervous system. All the nerves from the brain to the toes are energized, and coordination and balance are established inside the body. Additionally, bhujangasana expands the chest; this improves and deepens breathing, which in turn activates the parasympathetic nervous system.



How does practising dhanurasana benefit the nervous system?

Swami Satyananda: Dhanurasana is useful for overcoming lethargy and sluggishness in mind and body. It has a direct effect on the solar plexus at the navel, which is a large sympathetic nervous centre vitally important for healthy functioning of the body's organs. These nerves are brought into maximum efficiency, improving the functioning of

the whole body, especially the digestive, eliminative and reproductive organs.



How does practising yogamudrasana benefit the nervous system?

Swami Satyananda: During the practice of yogamudrasana the individual vertebrae are separated. This helps to release pressure on the spinal nerves as well as giving them a profound stretch and massage. These nerves connect the entire body to the brain and their improved health and functioning has beneficial repercussions throughout the body. Yogamudrasana is most useful for relaxing the whole mind and body.



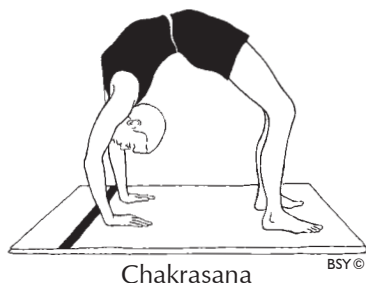
What is the effect of chakrasana on the nervous system and the pranic body?

Swami Niranjanananda: This position is the most powerful extension of the spine possible. It is also an inverted position. The whole nervous system is in a position it would normally never have to deal with. This means the nervous system is actually being stretched, which is the whole purpose of chakrasana.

The body is constructed so that forward bending can easily be done, stretching the spine in one direction only.

When extension or bending in the other direction takes place, each and every nerve, ligament and nadi is stretched. That stretch opens up the nadis which form a plexus at the different chakra areas. Therefore, in the Yoga Upanishads, chakrasana is used for opening or awakening the chakras.

When one breathes in this posture, certain habitual tensions are removed from the three major diaphragms of the body: the respiratory diaphragm, the perineum, and a third diaphragm under the brain. Furthermore, this posture integrates the upper and lower parts of the body so that the legs and arms work in a way that they do not normally. This effect of connecting the upper and lower parts of the body allows one to feel the body as a more complete unit.



What is the effect of sirshasana on the thyroid gland?

Swami Satyananda: The regular practice of sirshasana also acts directly on the thyroid gland in the same way as sarvangasana, helping to balance the metabolic functions and bring about wakefulness and alertness, but without excessive nervousness. Malfunctioning of the thyroid gland can result in many ailments either directly or indirectly. Sirshasana helps to bring perfect health to this vital gland.

How does practising sarvangasana benefit the endocrine system?

Swami Satyananda: Sarvangasana produces all the general effects of inverted poses, but with a distinctive influence on the thyroid and parathyroid endocrinal glands. Though all the

inverted poses affect these glands, the effect is much less than in sarvangasana. It is the influence on the thyroid and parathyroid glands that brings about changes in the whole body.

The pressure of the chest against the chin during sarvangasana specifically directs an enriched blood supply to organs in the neck region, as well as the thyroid and parathyroid glands. These include the ears, lungs, thymus and tonsils, important lymph nodes which produce antibodies for the protection of the organism from infection. All these organs function more efficiently due to the extra nourishment.

The thymus, which is situated in the upper part of the chest and is sometimes classified as an endocrine gland, plays an important part in the normal physical and mental growth of children. Sarvangasana is recommended for children to ensure efficient operation of this gland and hence normal development. The thymus also plays an immunological role in both children and adults, so its correct functioning ensures the auto-therapeutic capabilities of the body are fully active.

Regular practice of sarvangasana, principally by its favourable influence on the thyroid, ensures health of the entire body and can rejuvenate aging bodies. Since the thyroid controls the metabolism of the whole body, sarvangasana helps one maintain the correct body weight, assuming of course that the practitioner does not eat excessive amounts of food.

It should be noted that the hormones secreted by the thyroid are partially controlled by the pituitary gland. During sarvangasana, the pituitary gland also receives an enriched blood supply, though not as much as in sirshasana, mainly due to the impeded flow at the neck. Since both these controllers are regulated simultaneously, there is maximum benefit to the functions controlled by the secretion of their various hormones.

Sarvangasana's action on the parathyroid ensures correct bone growth and regeneration, and can prevent premature hardening of the bones.

How does practising dhanurasana benefit the endocrinal system?

Swami Satyananda: With the practice of dhanurasana, various endocrine glands are massaged and toned, notably the thyroid and the adrenals. The secretions of the adrenals are regularized. Blood is flushed through the glands. It is this effect that quickly removes tiredness, as cortisone is secreted to help with the required lift. Conversely, if one is overactive, the secretion of cortisone is reduced so that the body attains balance. This also helps to alleviate various types of rheumatism. Dhanurasana helps to regulate the menstrual cycle and to correct female infertility, if the cause is not due to deformity of the reproductive organs themselves.

THE EFFECTS OF PRANAYAMA AND BANDHAS

What is the effect of pranayama on the endocrine system?

Swami Niranjanananda: Pranayama harmonizes, purifies and neutralizes the secretions of the endocrine glands, thereby influencing thought and behaviour. The overall health of the endocrine system is largely dependent on the quality of the blood and its distribution to the glands. The richer and more liberal blood supply brought to the endocrine glands by pranayama, particularly the vitalizing practices, enhances their functioning, and the regulated breathing helps balance the system.

How can pranayama help hormonal disturbances?

Swami Satyananda: It has been found by doctors and scientists that the practice of pranayama maintains the health of the glandular system. These include the pineal gland, thymus, thyroid, pancreas, adrenals and gonads. These glands are important in one's mental, emotional and physical personality. For example, adrenalin is involved in fear complexes.

What is the effect of pranayama on the nervous system?

Swami Niranjanananda: Pranayama causes a richer and more liberal blood supply, benefiting the brain, spinal cord, cranial and spinal nerves. The inclusion of bandhas gives peripheral stimulus to the different nerve plexuses situated in the abdomen and thorax.

When one breathes slowly, deeply and in a systematic and coordinated manner, the neurons fire more rhythmically and the electrical interactions between the brain centres become more regulated. This means that wild fluctuations of the brainwaves are streamlined and there is balance between the two hemispheres of the brain. There are longer alpha waves and a reduction of beta waves. Alpha waves bring harmony to the brain as well as the coronary, respiratory and circulatory systems. People suffering from high blood pressure are benefited by influencing the alpha wave behaviour of the brain.

By practising pranayama systematically for a few years, a gradual transformation is brought about in the structure of the nervous system. Ultimately, there comes a moment when one closes the eyes, goes in and achieves meditation.

How can pranayama be used to balance the nervous system?

Swami Niranjanananda: When someone who is feeling hyperactive practices bhramari or nadi shodhana pranayama, within a few minutes they start to experience tranquillity in the mind and brain. On the other hand, if a person is depressed, and his awareness, his energy, is centred inside and he is unable to come out of the state of depression, then by practising bhastrika or kapalbhathi pranayama, that concentrated state of energy which is drawing the mind inwards will be rectified.

This change in the realm of *chitta*, mind, and *prana*, dynamic energy, takes place during the practices of pranayama and pratyahara, as certain psychic centres in the body are stimulated by the practices. For example, if

a person who is hyperactive, tense or dissipated begins to practise pranayama, the controlled inhalations and exhalations begin to relax and control the activity of the nervous system. With the regulation of the nervous system in the body, the automatic activities, such as the heartbeat and blood pressure, come into balance.

This state of physical balance will gradually influence cerebral activity, lower the high beta frequency, and induce the alpha state, in which feelings of relaxation and ease develop. The dissipated mind slowly comes to a state of relaxation, focusing at a point. The balancing energy of ida then begins to flow in the system, and the hyperactivity slowly reduces in intensity, as the person becomes centred. Through the pranayama, the body has been worked on at the level of the nervous system, at the level of the autonomic functions, at the level of the brain, and then gradually, at the level of external perceptions, centring both them and the mind.

What is the effect of bandhas on the endocrine and nervous systems?

Swami Satyananda: The performance of bandhas with pranayama affects the whole body: the organs, muscles, nerves and various physical processes are massaged, stimulated and controlled through the will of the practitioner.

The bandhas bring harmony and efficient functioning to the endocrine system. Jalandhara bandha directly influences the pituitary, pineal, thyroid, parathyroid and thymus glands; uddiyana bandha directly influences the adrenal glands and pancreas; moola bandha directly influences the gonads and the perineal body/cervix (which are said to be vestigial endocrine glands). All bandhas have an indirect effect on the pituitary and pineal glands, and the brain.

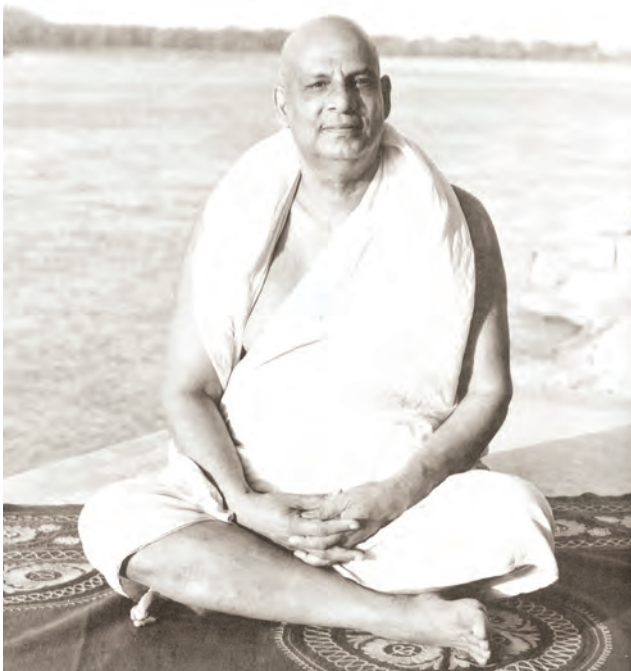
The performance of bandhas has been experimentally shown to activate all parasympathetic activities in the body which includes a decrease in heart rate, respiration and blood pressure (only in an individual with normal blood pressure), and a general sense of rest and relaxation.

Sympathetic activity in the body is decreased, a further sign of relaxation.

What is the effect of the bandhas on the nervous system?

Swami Satyananda: Parasympathetic fibres emerge from the neck and pelvic areas, while sympathetic fibres emerge from the upper back and lower back areas. The parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems are both rebalanced by the stimulation of the bandhas. This has a direct effect on the hypothalamus, (responsible for the endocrine system), which relays its information to the limbic (emotional) system and the cerebral cortex (outer layer of the brain).

Additionally, alpha brainwaves increase, a sign of deep relaxation indicating a slowing of nervous system activity. Confused and/or crossed neuronal circuits in the brain are reordered, in effect retraining the brain.



4

Hatha Yoga for Musculoskeletal Health

FLEXIBILITY

What causes stiffness in the body?

Swami Satyananda: Stiffness of the body can be caused by stiffness of the mind, but there are other factors which may be responsible. One is excess calcium in the bones. Calcium is a necessary ingredient in the body, but excessive calcium is harmful. Decalcification is also a dangerous disease. When one's body and bones have extra calcium, the bones and tissues become stiff and lose their natural flexibility. Later on, there is artificial formation of bone due to extra calcium, and when there is artificial formation of bone in a joint, arthritis develops.

Another cause of stiffness in the body occurs when foreign substances are deposited in the joint spaces. These can be the toxins from bacterial infections or residues from drugs which are taken for some other complaint and not fully eliminated from the bloodstream. Many of the preservatives and chemicals used in modern processed foods also produce stiffness or arthritis in this way. Similarly, a diet with too much protein in the form of meat and eggs overtaxes the body's ability to eliminate the breakdown products of protein, such as uric acid. These substances collect in the joint spaces, causing pain.

To maintain a flexible body these metabolic products and poisons must be promptly eliminated from the system and that requires sound digestion. Many people who complain of stiffness suffer from long-term constipation. As a result, these metabolic wastes are not efficiently eliminated and they accumulate in the blood, tissues and joints. Once constipation is eliminated by laghoo shankhaprakshalana, and sluggish circulation of body fluids is rebalanced by asanas such as pawanmuktasana, symptoms of arthritis often disappear.

How can the spine and other joints be made supple? Practise pawanmuktasana, marjari-asana and bhujangasana, and purify the diet, bringing down the calcium intake. Take care whenever the spinal column is exercised: give it very mild exercise. When asanas are practised, forward bending and backward bending postures must be balanced by each other. Practise bhujangasana, shalabhasana, paschimottanasana, ardha matsyendrasana and many other asanas.

It does not really matter if the body is stiff, but please don't have a stiff mind. That is a far greater limitation in life.

How does regular asana practice keep muscles and joints healthy?

Swami Sivananda: Thickened and immovable joints with consequent lack of free movement give a great deal of discomfort and uneasiness. If the joints move freely the ligaments and surrounding tissues will be in a healthy condition. By the practice of asanas, free movement is given to the all the joints, including the spinal joints. Free movement prevents the spine from stiffening and contracting, checking ossification and degeneration of the bones in the spinal column. Muscles of the cervical, dorsal and lumbar regions are also stretched and relaxed. The body is thus kept in a fit condition.

If muscles are not properly exercised, they contract. The blood circulation and nerve force are consequently impeded and functional disturbances of the organs and of general

nerve-tone result. The muscles atrophy. Practice of asanas keeps the muscles, organs and nerves in a healthy condition. In turn, sound functioning of the organs depends upon good healthy nerves.

Yoga, therefore, is the perfect system of physical culture. It is the king of all exercise systems. By practising these yogic exercises the body is made strong and healthy. There is no use theorizing: what is wanted is regular, systematic, sustained practice. An ounce of practice is better than tons of theory. Many people practise these exercises by fits and starts, giving up the practice after some months; hence the full benefits of the system are not derived. Regularity in the practice is a necessity.

What are the effects of forward bending on the legs?

Swami Satyananda: The legs receive an especially good stretch during forward bending poses, particularly if the asanas are done correctly, keeping the legs completely straight. The hamstring muscles in the back of the legs are often permanently contracted through inadequate usage. The forward bending poses stretch and tone these muscles and allow them to relax easily after termination of the asana. The articulation of the hip joints is also notably loosened.

Which backward bending asanas help beginners develop flexibility?

Swami Satyananda: *Saral bhujangasana*, the easy cobra pose, is especially good for stiff backs. *Ardha shalabhasana variation*, half locust pose variation, is beneficial for beginners with weak and stiff backs as it helps tone the back muscles and stimulate the nerves, particularly in the lower



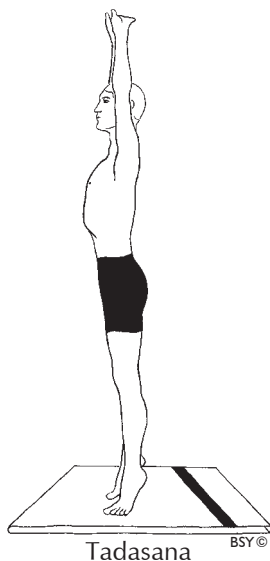
Ardha shalabhasana variation

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back, while simultaneously giving a strong diagonal stretch to the body. *Saral dhanurasana*, the easy bow pose, can also be practised by beginners to increase the flexibility of the back.

Why is traction of the spine important for flexibility?

Swami Niranjanananda: One of the movements of the body is traction, stretching up. Traction is something one rarely does in daily activity. Maybe if something has to be reached on top of a closet, one momentarily stretches up to bring that object down, but that is the maximum traction performed in daily life. The controlled movement of traction helps release tensions, and induces a free flow of blood through the different joints and muscles of the body.



In the practice of *tadasana* every joint and muscle is stretched upwards and the pressure accumulated between them is released. *Tadasana* stretches the entire body which helps to release pain, tensions and stiffness from the joints so that the body becomes charged with vitality again. By practising ten rounds of *tadasana* when feeling low in energy or lacking in stamina, one becomes dynamic instead of tired.

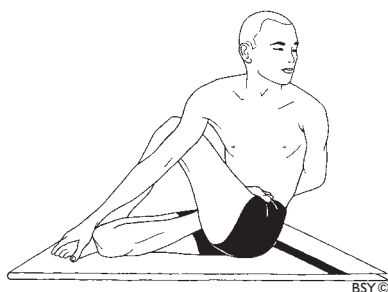
What are the benefits of asanas that twist the spine?

Swami Sivananda: The advantages derived from *ardha matsyendrasana*, the half spinal twist pose, are derived to a greater extent from *poorna matsyendrasana*, the full pose. The synovial fluid of the joints increases and the joints become very active. All the adhesions of the joints that are caused by rheumatism are removed.

Poorna matsyendrasana bestows beautiful health. It augments *prana shakti*, vigour and vitality, and consequently

removes innumerable diseases. The pressure of the heel on the navel forces blood towards the back which nourishes all the nerves of the back, particularly the nadis of the back. It awakens the kundalini and brings peace of mind.

Hail, hail to Yogi Matsyendra who first introduced this asana amongst the hatha yoga students!

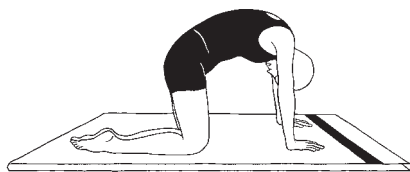
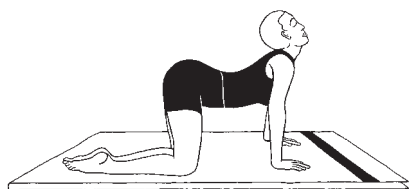


Poorna matsyendrasana

BACK AND SPINE

Why is back health so important and what sort of asana program maintains a strong back?

Swami Satyananda: In order to maintain perfect health, it is necessary to have a strong back. In the spinal cord there are vital nerve centres, and therefore many of the yoga asanas aim to improve the back. *Marjari-asana*, the cat pose is one of the best. There is also *bhujangasana*, the cobra pose, and *shalabhasana*, the locust pose. There are many asanas which strengthen the back.



Marjari-asana

Asanas should always be balanced with each other. For example, if there is a backward bending asana, the next should be forward bending, and the third should be sideways twisting. There is sideways twisting, sideways bending, forward bending, and backward bending: four kinds of postures. As well as these four there is another exercise for

stretching the back: it is called *tadasana*, the palm tree pose. Regular practise of asanas that move the spine in these different directions keeps the back and spine healthy.

What asanas can be practised for back conditions?

Swami Satyananda: Asanas must be practised for the spinal column, gently in the beginning. There are many causes of backache, including poor posture, nervous tension and general stiffness. Supta vajrasana, marjari-asana, vyaghrasana, tadasana, kati chakrasana and ardha matsyendrasana are among the most helpful asanas in these cases.

There are many diseases of the vertebral column, not just a few. Therefore, asanas must be practised according to the disease. It may be spondylitis or slipped disc, it might be some kind of arthritic problem, or it may be some sort of structural defect. It may be some problem of sciatica reflecting on the spinal cord.



Supta vajrasana

Can curvature of the spine be corrected by yoga?

Swami Satyananda: Curvature of the spine can be corrected at an early age before the bones are finally formed, but it is not possible after eighteen to twenty years of age. The practices are simple ones such as pawanmuktasana, bhujangasana, shalabhasana, gomukhasana and paschimottanasana.

How can height be increased with yoga asana?

Swami Satyananda: The powerful extension of the spine during forward bending poses can encourage a permanent, though possibly slight, increase in the practitioner's height, if practised regularly. Quite an appreciable height increase is possible, however, if the structure of the spine is deformed

in any way. Forward bending asanas can help to remove these deformities, increasing the person's height.

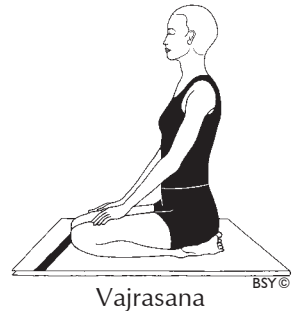
How can yoga cure slipped disk, spondylitis and sciatica?

Swami Satyananda: Diseases that have become common in modern civilization are slipped disc and cervical spondylitis. These are not Indian diseases, they are not diseases of a primitive culture. They are the diseases of an ultramodern culture, and they are extremely painful. Whoever suffers from slipped disc, may God bless them that the suffering passes.

These are diseases of faulty habits. What does yoga do for such diseases? Believe it or not, the first thing is to remove the foam and rubber, or those spring beds; remove those uncomfortable beds and provide the patient with a hard bed.

For slipped disc, the most important thing is to do only gentle backward bending. For example, *bhujangasana*, cobra pose, *shalabhasana*, locust pose, *makarasana*, crocodile pose, and *kandharasana*, shoulder pose; no heavy backward bending asanas, and no posture involving bending forward. In addition to this, *bhastrika pranayama*, the bellows breath, can be practised in a mild way, if it can be managed. Avoid lotus posture and siddhasana. For sitting, use only vajrasana and no other posture so that the two knees remain together and are not separated. One suffering from slipped disc should not hold weight on one side; the weight should be balanced on both sides. If a bag is lifted with the right or left hand there will be pain; it must be lifted with both hands.

It has been investigated and shown that slipped disc and also sciatica can be cured. The same postures relieve cervical spondylitis. The only difference and addition is: when practising for cervical spondylitis, the postures must be as mild, gentle and slow as possible, and the sitting



Vajrasana

postures of padmasana and siddhasana can be used. When practising, sit with an upright and straight spinal cord and with the chin directed slightly upwards, and don't move the body for five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, thirty, thirty-five, forty, forty-five, fifty, fifty-five, one hour. Start with five minutes and then gradually build up to one hour. This is not about meditation or samadhi, please remember; this is about a method to manage cervical spondylitis.

Many patients of sciatica, slipped disc and spondylitis have come for help in recent years. The first thing they are told is to throw away the foam rubber. Yoga can cure slipped disc, sciatica and cervical spondylitis.

How do backward bending asanas keep the spine and back healthy?

Swami Satyananda: On a physical level, the backward bending asanas stretch the abdominal muscles, and tone and strengthen the muscles controlling the spine. The spinal nerves, which emerge from between the adjoining vertebrae, are decompressed. This has beneficial repercussions throughout the body since these nerves give energy to all the other nerves, organs and muscles in the body.

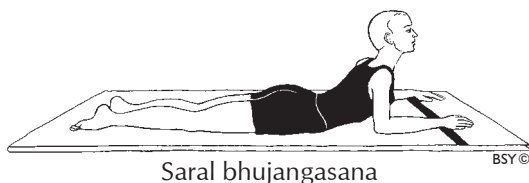
The spinal column is a 'stacked pile' of vertebrae and discs. Groups of muscles extend all along it, covering and supporting it from all sides. Maintenance of the spine in a straight and aligned position, despite all movement, depends totally on the balanced, supportive contraction and tone of the muscles. The muscles themselves are controlled unconsciously through posture.

Subconscious tensions and 'hang-ups' are often reflected in the tonic activity of the back muscles, resulting in too hard or too lax zones instead of homogeneous consistency. Research has shown that 90% of backache has its origin in muscular imbalance. If these imbalances are prolonged, the 'stack pile' of the vertebral column is disaligned, the ligaments are strained and symptoms of spondylitis, slipped disc, sciatica and osteoarthritis begin to manifest.

The practise of a balanced regime of backward and forward bending asanas can correct postural defects and neuromuscular imbalances of the vertebral column. As with all asanas, it is important to perform these practices with proper control and synchronization of the breath so that the whole group of muscles is uniformly contracted. Impure blood has a tendency to accumulate in the back region where circulation tends to be sluggish due to continuous maintenance of an upright position. These asanas help to circulate, purify and enrich the blood in this region.

Backward bending asanas create a negative pressure in the abdomen and pelvis, helping neurocirculatory toning of all the related organs. They also massage the abdomen and pelvic organs by stretching the muscles in this area, especially the rectus abdominis.

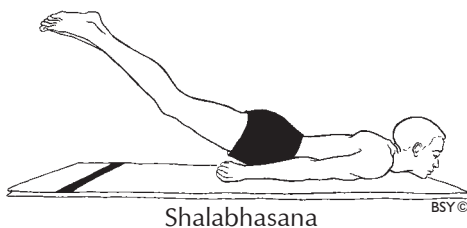
However, people with excessive lower back curve (lumbar lordosis) should not practise backward bending asanas, apart from *saral bhujangasana*, easy cobra pose, *ardha shalabhasana*, half locust pose and *gomukhasana*, cow's face pose.



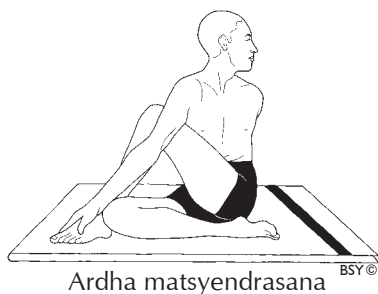
Which backward bends should be practised for complete spinal health?

Swami Satyananda: Three of the backward bending asanas, *bhujangasana*, cobra pose, *shalabhasana*, locust pose, and *dhanurasana*, bow pose, traditionally form a set. If practised consecutively during regular asana sessions, these asanas contribute much to ensuring or promoting a healthy body. They influence all the main systems of the body: nervous, glandular, circulatory, respiratory, digestive and alimentary, and so may be regarded as almost a necessity in establishing or maintaining general health.

The importance of a supple spine cannot be over emphasized. Besides providing the support framework for the trunk and head, it also provides protection to the large number of nerves that are distributed to all parts of the body. This triple set of asanas, bhujangasana, shalabhasana and dhanurasana, influence the whole spine, rendering it supple, stimulating the associated nerves and providing a good blood supply to them. Generally it can be said that: bhujangasana affects the spine in the upper back and neck, shalabhasana affects the lower parts of the spine, and dhanurasana affects the entire spine from top to bottom.



The spine will attain optimum condition if these three backward bending poses (or their equivalents) are counterposed by each of the following asanas: *paschimottasana*, spinal stretch pose, *pada hastasana*, hand to foot pose, or similar; which bends the spine forwards mainly in the lower region of the trunk; *halasana*, plough pose, which bends the spine forwards chiefly in the upper region of the trunk and neck; and *ardha matsyendrasana*, half spinal twist pose, which applies torsion to the spine.



How do bhujangasana, shalabhasana and dhanurasana complement each other?

Swami Satyananda: Dhanurasana roughly duplicates the benefits of bhujangasana and shalabhasana. However,

there are notable differences. In shalabhasana, the back muscles are tensed, while in dhanurasana they are passive. In bhujangasana, the back muscles should also be relaxed, but the main influence is on the small of the back in the region of the sacrum. In dhanurasana, the main influence is the intense intra-abdominal pressure. Each of these asanas has its place in an asana program. They complement each other. It is for this reason that they should be done consecutively.

Why is shalabhasana good for the back and spine?

Swami Niranjanananda: Shalabhasana strengthens the lower back and pelvic organs, and tones the sciatic nerves, providing relief from backache, mild sciatica and slipped disc as long as the condition is not serious. The parasympathetic nerves are particularly prominent in the region of the neck and pelvis. Shalabhasana stimulates the whole autonomic nervous system, especially the parasympathetic outflow.

Additionally, shalabhasana tones and balances the functioning of the liver, stomach, bowels and other abdominal organs, and stimulates the appetite.

What are the effects of bhujangasana on the spine?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhujangasana can help to remove backache and keep the spine supple and healthy. A stiff spine interferes with the nervous impulses sent from the brain to the body and vice versa. By arching the spine, improving circulation in the back region and toning the nerves, communication between the brain and body improves. People suffering from slipped disc or sciatica can also benefit from bhujangasana, but care should be taken.

What are the effects of dhanurasana on the spine?

Swami Niranjanananda: By practising dhanurasana the spinal column is realigned and the ligaments, muscles and nerves are activated, removing stiffness. Dhanurasana helps correct hunching in the upper back. Easier variations are prescribed

for the treatment of spinal disorders such as slipped disc, spondylitis or sciatica.

How does practising dhanurasana benefit the spine and back?

Swami Satyananda: The spinal column is realigned and rejuvenated. The ligaments, muscles and nerves are given a good stretch, especially on the front surface. This relieves stiffness and the spine is made more supple and healthy. The deep muscles of the back are exercised, causing stagnant blood to recirculate.

How does practising marjari-asana benefit the spine and back?

Swami Satyananda: Marjari-asana loosens up the spine. Those people with rigid spines and chronic back or neck ache are especially advised to do marjari-asana regularly.

What is the effect of forward bending asanas on the spine and back?

Swami Satyananda: Forward bending asanas move the spine into the position known as the primary curve, the shape it takes in the womb. During a forward bending asana each vertebra is separated, stimulating the nerves, improving circulation around the spine and nourishing the spinal cord. This has a positive impact on the organs of the body generally and on the brain specifically. This group of asanas is also important for making the back muscles supple and strong, compressing and massaging the abdominal organs, including the liver, kidneys, pancreas and intestines, and stretching the leg muscles and tendons.

The blood flow in the spinal region has a tendency to be sluggish. Forward bending poses squeeze this stagnant or semi-stagnant blood from the spinal areas, particularly the pelvis and lower back, returning the blood for recirculation and purification. On terminating the asana, an increased volume of enriched blood flows into the back muscles, the

spinal cord, the nerve ganglia and sympathetic nerves that surround the spine, and the parts of the parasympathetic system that emerge from the spine in the pelvic region. The overall result is the effective removal of waste matter and toxins and an enhanced supply of nourishment to the muscles and nerves. This in turn encourages more efficient functioning of these extensive parts of the body. The spinal nerves have connections with most of the organs, so their improved functioning has beneficial repercussions in many seemingly unrelated regions and organs of the body. In this way, many organic malfunctions can be rectified as the organs regain lost vitality.

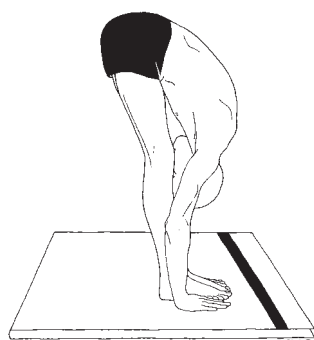
Besides the improved blood supply, the nervous system in and around the spine is generally stretched during the forward bending poses. This tends to invigorate the whole system, together with the organs and parts of the body that they innervate.

Most forward bending asanas start by bending from the hips and not the waist. Bending from the hips gives greater flexibility of movement and creates stronger pressure against the abdomen. Care must be taken not to force the back to bend further forward than present flexibility allows; rather, the muscles should be relaxed, allowing gravity and exhalation to move the body. With regular practice, even the most rigid back increases in flexibility.

People with any kind of back condition and those suffering from backache should consult a doctor before practising forward bending asanas. The specific contraindications for each practice should be carefully observed.

How does practising padahasthasana benefit the spine and back?

Swami Satyananda: A widespread symptom of modern living is back, neck and headache. These are generally caused by chronic stress and worry, muscular tension, displacement of vertebrae and compression of associated nerves and most commonly by a bad sitting position for extended periods



Padahasthasana

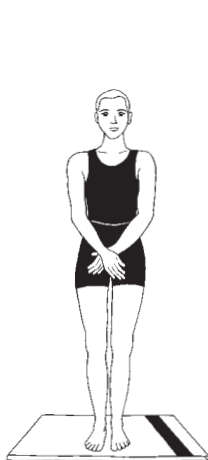
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of time. Padahasthasana helps to eliminate these causes and prevents pain in the spine and head. It is a particularly useful asana to do during work when these aches and pains easily arise.

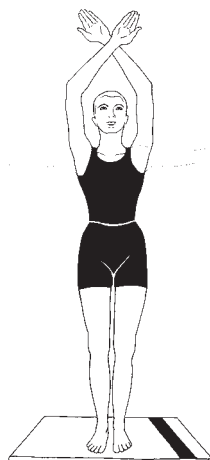
Padahasthasana is very beneficial for relocating minor displacements of the spinal vertebrae and for releasing nerves that are pinched by slightly displaced vertebrae (as in sciatica). Simultaneously, padahasthasana strengthens the spinal muscles, this often being the cause of slipped disc. Therefore, this is a useful asana for preventing sciatica and slipped disc and also treating mild cases after they have occurred. However, one should seek guidance before attempting to treat either of these two ailments; otherwise you may do more harm than good.

What are the benefits of the standing asanas?

Swami Satyananda: The standing series of asanas has a stretching and strengthening effect on the back, shoulders



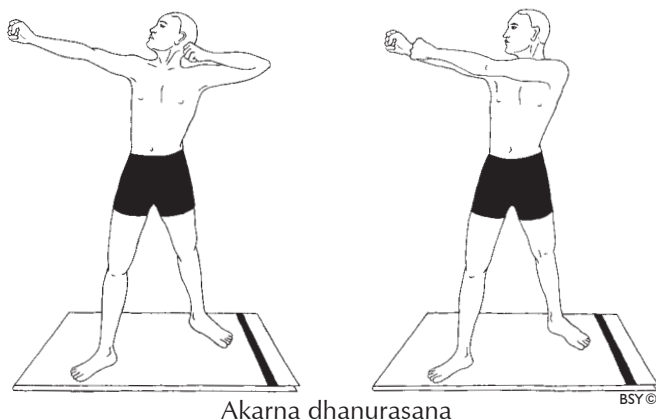
Bandha hasta utthanasana



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and leg muscles. They are particularly useful for those who spend a lot of time sitting down or who have stiffness or pain in the back. They improve posture, balance and muscular coordination. They also strengthen the muscles used to keep the back straight during meditation and increase oxygenation and lung capacity.

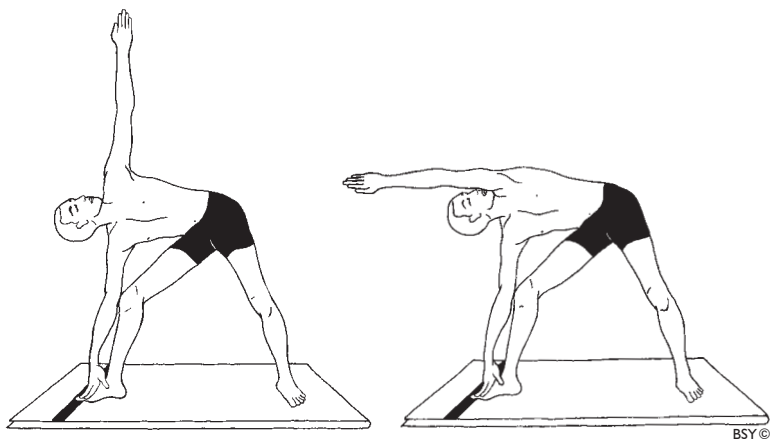
Those who suffer from sciatica or slipped disc may practise *bandha hasta utthanasana*, hand-raising pose, *akarna dhanurasana*, bow and arrow pose, and *tadasana*, palm tree pose, but should not practise any of the other standing asanas except under the guidance of a competent teacher. The specific contra-indications for each practice should be observed.



Why is trikonasana good for spinal health?

Swami Sivananda: Trikonasana, the triangle pose gives good lateral movement to the spine. It is an auxiliary to *ardha matsyendrasana*, the half-spinal twist; it amplifies and fulfils *ardha matsyendrasana*.

With a healthy spine one can sit in a meditation asana for many hours without fatigue. For a yogi the spine is most important as it is connected with the spinal cord and the sympathetic system. It is the spine that contains the important sushumna nadi which plays a vital part in the movement of kundalini.



Trikonasana variation 1 and 2

Why are spinal twisting asanas important?

Swami Satyananda: The spinal twisting asanas are important for spinal health. Every asana program should include at least one practice from this group, preferably following the forward and backward bending postures. The twist imposed on the spine and the whole trunk exercises the muscles, makes the spinal column more flexible and stimulates the spinal nerves. It also has a strong influence on the abdominal muscles, alternately stretching and compressing them as the body twists from one direction to the other.

Additionally, most of the spinal twist asanas enhance the pranic flow in the samana region, around the navel. This nourishes organs such as the pancreas, kidneys, stomach, small intestines, liver and gall bladder, relieves associated disorders, and rejuvenates the tissues generally. The samana region is also related to manipura chakra, a plexus of major nadis or pranic channels, supplying the whole body. These asanas therefore have a strong effect on total health and vitality.

On the emotional and psychic levels, controlled twisting and untwisting represents a means of managing the knots and problems one encounters. These asanas give insight and inspire a systematic approach to untying the tangled knots of life.

How does practising ardha matsyendrasana benefit the spine and back?

Swami Satyananda: Ardha matsyendrasana has been found beneficial in the treatment of backache, neck ache and headache as well as general body stiffness. It applies strong torsion to the spine, which reduces the tendency of adjoining vertebrae to fuse together, this being most prevalent with elderly people.

Ardha matsyendrasana helps remove any tendency towards round shoulders and has been found useful by many people who have mild cases of sciatica and slipped disc. Remember also that the health of the body depends greatly on the condition of the spinal nerves, for these are the communication lines between the brain and body.

If this asana is done for long periods of time with awareness it can bring about a wonderful sense of relaxation and easily lead to fruitful introspection. The fact that Yogi Matsyendranath once practised inner yoga techniques in the full form of the asana is a good recommendation.

What is the effect of sarvangasana on the spine?

Swami Satyananda: Many asanas bend the spine in the region of the back in a forward direction. *Sarvangasana*, the shoulder stand pose, is one of the few asanas, along with *halasana*, the plough pose, which bends the vertebral column in the region of the neck in a forward direction. Thus, this asana keeps this area supple and improves the articulation between the individual cervical vertebrae.

What is the effect of sirshasana on the spine?

Swami Satyananda: One of the greatest hazards of living a sedentary life is the fact that most people are required to sit or stand in one position, which is often posturally incorrect, for long periods of time. This, together with the constant force of gravity acting on the body, imposes a severe burden on the vertebral column.

When one practises sirshasana, not only is the effect of gravity on the vertebral column reversed, but it assumes a postural position that is structurally correct, providing the top of the head rests on the floor and not the forehead. In other words, no strain is imposed on the spine, other than that for which it is designed.

If one studies a diagram of the human skeleton, it will be immediately obvious that the entire weight of the trunk, head and arms is supported by the vertebral column; this in turn is supported about the articulation of the fifth lumbar vertebra with the sacrum in the region of the hips. Besides bearing this load, this joint has to facilitate forward, backwards and sideways movements. This renders the disc between the fifth lumbar vertebra and sacrum more vulnerable to strain than all the other vertebral discs. During the practice of sirshasana the weight sustained at this articulation is reversed so that it only bears the weight of the legs and pelvis, bringing relief to this region. The cervical vertebrae, providing the neck is not excessively weak, can easily support the weight of the body, providing they are not tensed but allowed to hunch or compress in the way that they are designed.

What are the benefits of shashankasana for the spine and back?

Swami Satyananda: Shashankasana is a reasonably simple asana yet it gives many benefits. Most people have stiff backs. Shashankasana stretches the back muscles and separates the individual vertebrae from each other. This releases pressure on the discs that keep the vertebrae apart. Often nerve connections emanating from the spinal cord are squeezed by these discs, giving rise to various forms of backache and sciatica. The separation of the discs during shashankasana helps to relieve these pains and encourages the discs to resume their correct locations.

The stretching of the back muscles removes sluggish and depleted blood. On completion of the asana fresh blood

is soaked up by the muscles in the same way that water is absorbed by a sponge. This regenerates both the back muscles and the all important spinal nerves.

ARTHRITIS

Can yoga help rheumatoid arthritis?

Swami Satyananda: Once the ashram received a request from the education department of the state to train higher secondary school teachers in yoga. We wondered why these government officers had suddenly become aware of the benefits of teaching yoga in schools. What was the story behind it?

Here's what had happened. One of the sons of the Chief Secretary of Education was suffering from rheumatoid arthritis. He was brought to the ashram, but I was not prepared to accept him because he had to be looked after completely. He could do nothing. He was virtually a dead man enacting life. I was not prepared for him because, although the ashram is big, many people come there and consequently we are often hard pressed for accommodation. However, some of my disciples knew the boy and intervened on his behalf. So I kept him and his mother for three months.

I didn't know whether he experienced any improvement as I was out on tour during this period. When I returned, he was no longer there, and I forgot the affair completely. A few months later he came back and he could walk. He came in, bowed low, and greeted me in Hindu fashion. This was the first I saw of his improvement. Recently, when I was coming through Patna from an overseas trip, he took leave of me and said, "Swamiji, next time I will come to the ashram alone." He now goes to the bathroom, takes his own bath, washes his own clothes, cleans his own plate, sweeps his own room and makes his own bed.

The father of the young man never expected this improvement because the medical experts had said,

“Nothing can be done, go to England or America, they may have a way, but here in India we do not have a cure for rheumatoid arthritis.” The Secretary of Education was thus so obliged that he spoke with his colleagues in the government. He reasoned that a science that could deal so positively, so successfully, and so immediately with such a condition as rheumatoid arthritis should be taught to the teachers and professors and that they in turn could teach the children. In this way, the next generation would have a better idea about the therapeutic possibilities of yoga.



5

Hatha Yoga and the Respiratory System

BREATHING FOR HEALTH

What is meant by correct breathing?

Swami Satyananda: Most people breathe incorrectly, using only a small part of their lung capacity. The breathing is then generally shallow, depriving the body of oxygen and prana essential for good health. The first practices taught to pranayama students are preparatory techniques which introduce correct breathing habits. In addition, they help focus the awareness on the breathing process, which is otherwise normally ignored.

Although it takes some time to learn, it is possible to control the actions of respiration. Once the breathing has been corrected, one feels much better. When one breathes in, the stomach should inflate; when one breathes out the stomach should contract. Abdominal contraction and abdominal inflation should be synchronized with the breathing process. This is seen in all animals. Observe a dog or cat or any other animal.

The breath is both gross and subtle. The gross breath is perceptible and the subtle breath is imperceptible. When the breath becomes subtle it improves the quality of awareness. The ingoing and outgoing breath should be uniform. It should not be thick or thin, broken or in waves.

How does incorrect breathing affect one's health?

Swami Satyananda: A person's health depends on the way they breathe and most people do not know how to breathe. If breathing is incorrect, there will be a tendency towards disease. Many people breathe only from the chest. Others contract their stomach during inhalation and expand it during exhalation. This is totally wrong. Before learning pranayama, the breathing must be corrected.

Why does yoga teach correct breathing?

Swami Satyananda: Before learning pranayama, yoga students must develop sensitivity to the respiratory process and retrain the muscles of the pulmonary cavity, enhancing their vital capacity and preparing them for pranayama.

Rhythmic, deep and slow respiration stimulates and is stimulated by calm, content states of mind. Irregular breathing disrupts the rhythms of the brain and leads to physical, emotional and mental blocks. These, in turn, lead to inner conflict, an unbalanced personality, a disordered lifestyle and disease. Pranayama establishes regular breathing patterns, breaking this negative cycle and reversing the debilitating process. It does so by giving one control of the breath and re-establishing the natural, relaxed rhythms of the body and mind.

What are the physical advantages of breathing deeply and slowly?

Swami Satyananda: Deep breathing allows maximum intake for each respiration and slow breathing allows optimum exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide. Time is required to transfer oxygen from the lungs to the blood, and for carbon dioxide in the blood to be transferred into the lungs for expulsion into the air. If one breathes rapidly, then the optimum oxygen and carbon dioxide exchange is not reached in the lungs. If the respiration is slow then the optimum transfer can be achieved. This is why depth and speed of breathing are so important in relation to each other.

Why is the science of breathing so important for wellbeing?

Swami Satyananda: Pranayama has a two-sided effect. It helps to keep the physical apparatus pure and in good order, and also to control, regulate and channel the mental-emotional being. Pranayama involves controlled, rhythmic and regular breathing. Prana is the gross manifestation in the physical body of the subtle, universal, cosmic force. It is this cosmic energy that gives life to all sentient beings. Pranayama is the technique of conservation and distribution of this life force.

While inhaling, oxygen is taken in, and while exhaling carbon dioxide is discharged. Oxygenation of the system makes the body pure, light and active. Unless the science of breathing is properly understood and correctly practised, there is a likelihood of imbalance in breathing, which may result in various types of mental and emotional conflicts and impulsiveness. The world with its innumerable joys and sorrows makes a violent impact upon the individual, and one often fails to find a realistic way of adjusting to life. The effect of prana on the human being and the correlation between the mind and the body are fully realized in yoga.

How does the way of breathing influence the length of life?

Swami Satyananda: In addition to influencing the quality of life, the length or quantity of life is also dictated by the rhythm of the respiration. The ancient yogis and rishis studied nature in great detail. They noticed that animals with a slow breath rate such as pythons, elephants and tortoises have long lifespans, whereas those with a fast breathing rate such as birds, dogs and rabbits live for only a few years. From this observation they realized the importance of slow breathing for increasing the human lifespan.

Those who breathe in short, quick gasps are likely to have a shorter lifespan than those who breathe slowly and deeply. On the physical level, this is because the respiration is directly related to the heart. A slow breathing rate keeps the heart stronger and better nourished, and contributes to a longer life. Deep breathing also increases the absorption of

energy by pranamaya kosha, enhancing dynamism, vitality and general wellbeing.

What is paradoxical breathing?

Swami Niranjanananda: The gasping breath or the paradoxical breath is a way of breathing outside the domain of the three natural methods of breathing. It manifests when the need to stimulate the sympathetic nervous system is most intense. One inhales so deeply and quickly that the abdominal wall moves in during inhalation rather than out. This is what occurs in a state of shock. For example, if one takes an ice-cold shower on a winter morning the mouth will probably open and suck air in with a gasp at the first contact with the water.

This is called paradoxical breathing because the abdominal wall moves in rather than out during inhalation, and out rather than in during exhalation. Paradoxical breathing stimulates the sympathetic nervous system even more than thoracic breathing. If one were to breathe in this way for even 10–15 breaths, one would immediately feel nervous and jumpy, for it gives an immediate jolt of adrenalin causing the fight or flight reaction. It is usually seen only in a state of acute anxiety.

How can the breath be corrected?

Swami Niranjanananda: The first step in re-learning proper breathing is to master abdominal breathing. Some may find it difficult at first, but with practice it becomes automatic and natural. Abdominal breathing should be practised first in shavasana, then in a sitting or standing position.

Why is abdominal breathing important?

Swami Niranjanananda: The diaphragm separates the lungs from the abdominal cavity. In normal breathing it hardly moves, but during deep breathing it extends downward into the abdomen on inhalation and upward on exhalation, promoting the most efficient type of breathing. Less effort is expended in diaphragmatic breathing to obtain the

same quantity of air. Infants and small children use their diaphragms exclusively for breathing. Chest breathing occurs only later, after the bony structure of the chest matures.

Diaphragmatic breathing should be cultivated in daily life until it becomes a spontaneous habit. Nowadays, however, few have the ability to breathe with the abdomen due to tension, unhealthy habits, poor posture and tight clothing. A complete revolution in the state of physical and mental wellbeing can be obtained by mastery of this technique.

X-ray observations of diaphragmatic movement have shown that relaxed, pleasant thoughts and sensations increase its movement considerably while the breath becomes slower and deeper. Not only do relaxed thoughts allow muscle relaxation and greater diaphragmatic movement, but slow, relaxed breathing also calms the mind. Deep breathing has been observed to release endorphins into the bloodstream. The endorphins are potent brain chemicals which help one cope with pain and are part of the mechanism for dealing with and eliminating fear and anxiety.

PRANAYAMA AND HEALTH

What are the benefits of pranayama for the body's physical systems?

Swami Niranjanananda: The benefits of consistent pranayama practice for the systems of the body are many. The functioning of the respiratory, circulatory, digestive, excretory, endocrine and nervous systems becomes healthier, stronger and more efficient in those who practise pranayama regularly.

What are the benefits of pranayama for the respiratory system?

Swami Niranjanananda: Pranayama exercises the muscles of respiration and the lungs through the processes of deep, rapid or slow breathing. This strengthens the respiratory

muscles and makes the lungs more elastic, resulting in a healthier process of respiration. The training given to the respiratory organs and muscles during the pranayama practice prepares them to work efficiently throughout the day. With more efficient respiratory apparatus, a larger quantity of oxygen is absorbed than otherwise.

What is the relationship between pranayama and health?

Swami Satyananda: Investigations have been conducted into the effects of pranayama on the respiratory, circulatory and nervous systems. It has been found that through the practice of pranayama the nervous systems can be properly balanced and the cardiovascular system strengthened. It has also been recognized by scientists that through the practice of pranayama, blockages of energy that occur in the body can be cleared.

Scientific studies on pranayama have shown startling results. They have shown that during pranayama the different areas in the body emit extra electrical impulses. Pranayama as a method bombards the whole body with oxygen. When the physical cells of the body are bombarded with extra oxygen, they are repaired.

These are the most important results of pranayama, but there are therapeutic aspects as well. It helps in cold, cough and coryza (runny nose.) It helps in diseases of the vertebral column. It improves heart health.

Through pranayama, the behaviour of the brain can be improved. Through pranayama fluctuations of the mind can be controlled to a large extent. It is so powerful that anyone suffering from mental weakness, depression, etc., can be greatly benefited by practising pranayama.

Through the practice of pranayama, wild fluctuations of the brainwaves can be properly regulated. By the practice of certain pranayamas, blood pressure can be reduced, and certain pranayamas bring balance between the two hemispheres of the brain. What is more striking, is that pranayama improves the health of the pineal gland.

The pineal gland is a stop-check on the behaviour of the pituitary, which regulates the body's hormonal system. If the hormonal secretions from different glands are not properly regulated, there is an imbalance between the physical and mental personalities. If the pineal gland does not check the behaviour of the pituitary gland then the emotions can be difficult to handle.

Does pranayama increase physical and mental vitality?

Swami Niranjanananda: Through a physical process of releasing tension, the practice of asana removes blockages so that energy circulates efficiently through the system. But there may be a lack of energy, in which case it can be built up with the help of pranayama. The breath plays an important role in life without one's knowledge. A person breathes from the time of birth and will continue breathing until the time of death, but the experience of the breath tends to be limited to the external.

The way one breathes affects the level of vitality. Via pranayama the breath can be used to raise the vitality. The breath is linked with the state of one's nervous system. By breathing in slowly and deeply the state of the nervous system can be altered and the brain can be influenced. The activity of the brain can be altered in terms of the brainwaves, and simultaneously the mind is influenced. Yoga says that the breath is linked with prana, and prana means vital force, vital energy. Prana is the energy which is directly related with life and which is expanded with the practices of pranayama.

The practices connect the individual with the source of energy so that one's physical and mental energies do not become depleted. This brings about continuous alertness and a sense of wellbeing, dynamism and vitality. The purpose of pranayama is not to learn how to breathe properly but to awaken the inherent energy, the power or prana, within.

The process of energization through pranayama can be understood from another perspective. Pranayama creates

static electricity in the body which helps to recharge the positive ions breathed in from the environment and convert them into negative ions. The effect is the same as that created by rain and thunderstorms. Hot and sultry weather makes one feel lethargic, but the air becomes fresh and clean with rain, and one feels energized and dynamic. Rain and thunderstorms charge the positive ions in the environment and convert them into negative ions. Similarly, pranayama generates static electricity in the body in minute quantities and there is a feeling of improved energy and dynamism.

What is the therapeutic value of the effect of pranayama on brainwave patterns?

Swami Satyananda: The practice of pranayama has a tremendous effect on the behaviour of the brain, inducing alpha brainwaves which bring harmony to the brain, the coronary, the respiratory and the circulatory systems. It is important for people suffering from hypertension and high blood pressure to be able to influence the alpha wave behaviour of the brain, and pranayama is a simple method.

Hundreds of tests and experiments have been conducted and all have unequivocally concluded that pranayama has a tranquillizing effect on both hemispheres of the brain. It has also been proved that during the practice of pranayama the pressure exerted on the coronary system is completely withdrawn. The meaning of this must be understood: when there is pressure on the coronary system, the consequence is either heart attack, angina pectoris, or something similar.

What is the effect of blockages in the nadis on health?

Swami Niranjanananda: In pranayama practice, once the breath is controlled and harmonized, one moves into the dimension of prana. In that dimension one works with the nadis. Each nadi is a conductor of energy. If there is any block in these channels and energy does not flow, the corresponding organ of the body is affected. That is known as illness. The corresponding organ of the body becomes

weak: it goes through the process of infirmity, weakness and old age at a faster rate than normal.

What are the health benefits of practising kapalbhati?

Swami Sivananda: Kapalbhati cleanses the respiratory system and nasal passages, and removes spasm in the bronchial tubes. Consequently asthma is relieved and may be cured in the course of time. Tuberculosis may be cured by this practice. Impurities of the blood are thrown out. The apices of the lungs receive proper oxygenation and thereby do not afford a suitable breeding ground for bacteria.

The lungs are well developed by this practice. Carbon dioxide is largely eliminated, and the tissues and cells absorb a large quantity of oxygen. The heart functions properly. The circulatory and respiratory systems are toned, and the practitioner enjoys good health.

How does kapalbhati benefit the respiratory system?

Swami Satyananda: Kapalbhati benefits the respiratory system by cleaning out the lungs and improving their elasticity, resulting in more efficient oxygen-carbon dioxide exchange.

Kapalbhati should certainly be practised by those suffering from respiratory ailments such as bronchitis and tuberculosis. Those who suffer from asthma and emphysema will, from habit and necessity, use forceful exhalation to expel air from the lungs. This tends to induce severe muscular tiredness. Kapalbhati, practised at times other than during an attack, may be useful in making respiratory muscles stronger, as well as improving the general tone of the lungs.

How does kapalbhati help people with respiratory disorders?

Swami Niranjanananda: With the practice of kapalbhati fresh air reaches the lower peripheries of the lungs, while stale air is expelled. During this practice the respiratory system is activated, and the exchange of oxygen and carbon

dioxide is increased. This practice benefits people suffering from respiratory ailments, including chronic bronchitis and tuberculosis.

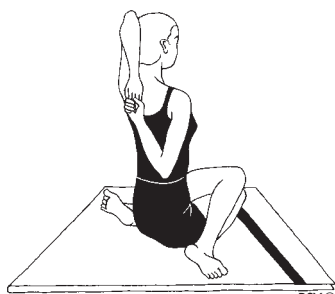
People suffering from severe asthma and chronic lung disease often develop a habit of using the accessory muscles of respiration to breathe forcibly, and also tend to exhale with increased muscular force, making the muscles tired and causing fatigue. Such people should practise kapalbhati, but not while having an asthma attack.

ASANAS AND RESPIRATORY HEALTH

What influence does gomukhasana have on the respiratory system?

Swami Niranjanananda: The base position of gomukhasana locks the hips and pelvis, creating a firm base for stretching the sides of the trunk and opening up the chest. It is important to remember that during the practice, the breathing process should take place from the abdomen, not from the chest. While inhaling, the abdomen is expanded; while exhaling, the abdomen is contracted.

Gomukhasana opens up the chest area, expanding the lungs and increasing the breathing capacity. Thus it is beneficial in the treatment of asthma and other respiratory diseases. Due to the opening up of the pectoral



muscles at the front of the chest, gomukhasana unlocks much of the tension that is acquired from the stooped posture of day to day sedentary living. A lot of tension accumulates in the shoulders; this powerful stretch breaks any shoulder tension, while opening up and improving lung function.

How does practising dhanurasana benefit the respiratory system?

Swami Satyananda: By lying on the diaphragm with the arms stretched back, the heart is given a gentle massage and as the chest is fully expanded, dhanurasana is useful in the treatment of various chest ailments. For example, it is suitable for removing the hunching tendency of asthmatics, which aggravates ill health. Dhanurasana realigns the back and thereby improves the breathing processes. This in turn leads to free flow of air through the nasal passages.

What is the effect of sarvangasana on respiration?

Swami Satyananda: The position of the body during sarvangasana means that the practitioner must breathe abdominally: the pressure between the chest and the chin completely prevents the movement of the ribs towards the head (clavicular respiration) and imposes a severe limitation on expansion of the ribs outwards (intercostal respiration). Only the movement of the diaphragm is unimpeded apart from the weight of the abdominal organs, and the practitioner is forced to do abdominal breathing.

This asana is particularly useful for people who suffer from asthma, since it obliges them to breathe diaphragmatically, whereas normally they would tend to breathe with an accentuated clavicular respiration.

As for inverted poses generally, the redistribution of the weight of the abdominal organs improves respiration. Additionally, certain nerves which innervate the respiratory system are stimulated, further improving respiratory function.

What is the effect of sirshasana on respiration?

Swami Satyananda: Modern man in general does not breathe correctly, even though this is one of the most important functions in the body. People tend to underuse the capacity of the lungs, only breathing more fully when they physically exert themselves. For maximum functional efficiency,

breathing should be deep and slow; sirshasana particularly encourages this.

In sirshasana the weight of abdominal organs acts on the diaphragm, assisting exhalation. Due to the fixed capacity of the lungs, one can only inhale as much air as has previously been exhaled. Thus, both exhalation and inhalation are improved. The enhanced exhalation removes a larger amount of residual air and carbon dioxide from the lungs, together with toxins and germs which tend to accumulate in this stagnant air. The enhanced inhalation draws in larger quantities of life-giving oxygen.

How does practising sirshasana benefit the process of respiration?

Swami Satyananda: During inhalation the diaphragm has to move upwards against the weight of the abdominal organs, strengthening the diaphragm due to the greater than normal resistance. This slightly increases the air pressure in the lungs, opening up and uncrumpling the alveoli (air cells), and improving the oxygen-carbon dioxide exchange within the lungs. This means that more oxygen enters the body and more unwanted carbon dioxide is removed supplementing the health benefits obtained from improved blood circulation to the brain.

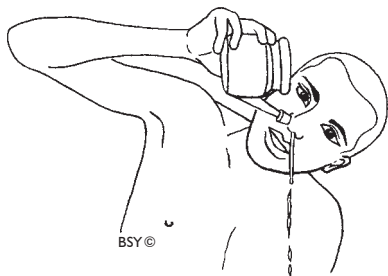
NETI: NASAL CLEANSING

Why does keeping the nostrils clean promote good health?

Swami Sivananda: The nostrils must always be kept clean. Unclean nostrils lead to irregular breathing, and irregular breathing makes one sick. Neti is for the purification of the nostrils. Head colds and hay fever are cured with neti.

Why should neti be practised even when the nose is not blocked?

Swami Satyananda: Regular practice of neti when one doesn't have a cold keeps the nasal passages working at



Jala neti



Sutra neti

optimum efficiency and thereby helps keep the body healthy. Remember, breathing through the mouth or insufficient treatment of the inhaled air prior to entry into the lungs, due to nasal blockage and congestion, encourages the onset of disease by allowing germs to infect the lungs, or by generally weakening the body.

How long does it take to experience the benefits of neti?

Swami Niranjanananda: The benefits of neti are experienced immediately, as it clears the nasal passages and sinuses.

Why is neti good for general health?

Swami Satyananda: Neti has a subtle influence on the various nerves which end in the nasal passages, such as the olfactory bulb and adjacent nerves which innervate the eyes and ears. Respiration is much easier when the nose is clean and clear, leading to an improved intake of oxygen, improved removal of carbon dioxide and consequently better health.

These effects have a soothing influence on the brain and can help to relieve ailments such as migraine, epilepsy, depression, insomnia, and tension. Neti also helps cure sinusitis, ailments of the eyes, nose and throat, tonsillitis, catarrh, and inflammation of the adenoids and mucous membranes. It leaves a general feeling of lightness and freshness in the head, and removes drowsiness. The benefits of neti kriya are many.

What are the general health benefits of neti?

Swami Niranjanananda: Neti is an ENTE practice – ear, nose, throat, eyes. There are many tiny, sensitive nerves connecting the eyes, ears, mouth, throat and brain. Not only are the sinuses cleared with neti, but at the same time as the water flows, sensations are created in these tiny little nerves and they are stimulated. There are many examples of short-sightedness being rectified with neti, as neti stimulates the optical nerves. Neti can also reduce hearing loss by stimulating the associated nerves. In *Hatharatnavali* (1:40) it says:

*Kapaalashodhanee chaiva divyadrishitipradaayinee;
Jatroordhvajaatarogadhnaa jaayate netiruttamaa;
Netisvaroopam kathitam shreenivaasena yoginaa.*

This best neti cleanses the frontal sinuses, bestows keen eyesight and destroys the multitude of diseases in the region above the clavicle. Thus, Srinivasa yogi has explained neti.

The sinuses are cleaned, the nose is unblocked, and one can breathe properly. The forehead is stimulated, helping relieve migraine and other types of headaches. Neti cleanses and clears the throat, and the vocal cords and related nadis are activated and influenced.

Neti helps manage headache, eye ache, ear ache and throat ache. Neti is the biggest ENT doctor in the world.

What are the benefits of sutra neti?

Swami Satyananda: Sutra neti gives a frictional massage to the internal mucous membranes of the nose, strengthening the membranes, making them more efficient and more able to effectively condition – that is clean, moisten, disinfect and warm – the air as it flows into the nose prior to entering the lungs.

Sutra neti stimulates many of the large number of nerve endings in the nasal passages. This improves the innervation of the various functions of the nose and their connections with the brain.

This stimulation also causes a slight irritation to the mucous membranes, resulting in increased blood circulation in the nose which tends to encourage excessive secretion of mucus for a short period of time. This is beneficial, for it removes any stagnation of blood in the nostrils and flushes out the secretory glands. The organs in the nose are consequently encouraged to function far more effectively. This includes the eyes, since the tear duct outlet in the nose and the blood supplies are closely connected.

Sutra neti is an excellent method of preventing colds or other inflammations of the nose, especially if it is supplemented with jala neti. The nasal passages are rendered more resistant to attack by germs or viruses.

The ideal combination is sutra neti performed in conjunction with jala neti. Jala neti removes the less ingrained obstructions and flushes out the nose, while sutra neti removes the more obstinate foreign bodies and dried up mucus deposits. It is for this reason that it is highly recommend that jala neti be practised immediately after sutra neti to flush out all the particles in the nose and leave it in the cleanest possible condition.

How does sutra neti keep the nostrils healthy?

Swami Niranjanananda: With the practice of sutra neti the mucous membrane is properly massaged, its function is enhanced, blood flow is increased and the blood supply to the nostrils is optimized. The moving thread or catheter exerts pressure on the glandular lining of the nostrils, reducing swelling and inflammation. Any abnormal growth of the nasal bone is reduced due to the friction produced in sutra neti. Thus one gets relief from sinusitis, rhinitis and abnormal growth of the nasal bone by doing sutra neti.

How does neti help prevent and cure the common cold?

Swami Satyananda: Neti is the best method of preventing and eliminating colds. An effective cure for the common cold has not yet been found. Neti is not foolproof, but it goes a long

way to solving the problem. A cold indicates that the body is in a weakened condition. The cold virus flourishes in nerve tissue, particularly the olfactory nerves in the nose. During a cold, neti greatly helps by removing the accumulated mucus in the nose, this being a breeding ground for the cold virus.

Regular practice of neti during good health keeps the nasal passages working at optimum efficiency and thereby helps prevent disease. When one is forced to breathe through the mouth due to a blocked nose, normal filtering of the air does not take place. Breathing through the mouth, or insufficient treatment of the inhaled air due to nasal congestion, encourages the onset of disease by allowing germs to infect the lungs, or by generally weakening the body.

What are the effects of neti on allergies?

Swami Niranjanananda: The effects of neti on allergy are remarkable. Medical science has acknowledged multiple triggers of allergy: smoke, dust, certain fibres, pollen, animal hair and more. One of the causes of respiratory disease, including asthma, is allergy. With the practice of neti these diseases can be cured without any other remedy. Insomnia and tiredness can also be resolved with this practice. It allows the lungs to receive air that has been efficiently cleansed by the nostrils, helping the whole body remain healthy.

How can yoga cure sinusitis?

Swami Satyananda: The simplest way to manage sinusitis is with neti kriya and pranayama. Neti kriya is something that every practitioner of hatha yoga knows. It can be practised with warm saline water, with something that is a lubricant like ghee, butter or oil, or with a catheter. Many people practise neti with amaroli, which has been found to be extremely powerful.

In addition to neti, one should practise pranayama. Pranayamas like bhasrika stimulate the nerves of the mucous membrane of the nose. If, however, the disease becomes acute, a specialist should be consulted.

HATHA YOGA FOR ASTHMA

How does yoga view the underlying cause of asthma?

Swami Satyananda: When one suffers from asthma it appears that it is a disease of the respiratory system; either respiratory congestion or the inability to inhale to capacity. The attitude of yoga, however, is to look more deeply for the source of the problem: the centre which controls respiration is situated in the brain.

If shatkarmas and pranayamas are practised one can be rid of asthma, but that's not a cure, it's treatment. Final cure takes place when one has been able to go into that centre in the brain and reset the disharmony or the defect causing the misbehaviour of that centre. This can be done by meditation. Here is an example. A man had only one son. One day that boy went to the swimming pool and there he died. The wife cried and expressed her agony, but the father was strong and suppressed his agony. In the course of time he developed asthma. Eventually he was on the point of death. He came to the ashram and lived there for a period of three months: he was taught shatkarmas and pranayama, but nothing really worked.

One day, a young swami was sent to that man with the duty to give him coffee, tea and hot water. The man got better. Why? Because his asthma was not respiratory congestion. He wasn't being taught the wrong things but his asthma was on account of the grief and agony that had upset the cerebral mechanism. The boy who was given the duty resembled his son and compensated for his son; this put the whole mechanism in proper order, and that man recovered.

Kindly remember that the root cause of asthma is upset of a mechanism, breakdown of a mechanism in the higher centres in the brain, which is reflected in the respiratory system.

What practices help relieve asthma?

Swami Satyananda: Asthma can be completely eradicated by the practice of yoga and hatha yoga. If the teacher knows the science well, the problem can be tackled. There are certain practices which prevent asthma attacks, and others for use at the time of an asthma attack. A few practices are particularly useful.

When there is a feeling that some respiratory congestion is taking place and an asthma attack is coming, *shashankasana* must be practised. Remain there as long as possible; there is no time restriction. Ten minutes, twenty, half an hour, one hour; if it cannot be held for some time, then return to the upright position for a while. Repeat the practice. If the nose gets blocked, sit up, then when the nose is clear, practise it again. This will stimulate the adrenal glands. It's not treatment, it's not cure, it's to avert the asthma attack.

The next practise is to sit in lotus posture, *padmasana*. If that isn't possible, then sit in *siddhasana* or *siddha yoni asana*. If that isn't possible, sit in *vajrasana*. Assume one of these three postures. Close the eyes for five minutes and concentrate between the eyebrows. If it's difficult to concentrate between the eyebrows, take a coin or something that can be stuck on the forehead. In India some paste is put there. Improvise something to help you feel that point, then concentrate on the eyebrow centre for five minutes.

Another practice is *sirshasana*, headstand pose, which increases respiratory capacity. If that can't be done immediately, then practise *vipareeta karani asana*.

The practice of *kunjil*, regurgitation of salted water, must also be done. Don't drink the water, gulp it, then vomit it quickly. This helps asthma because the vagus nerve, which is connected with the lungs, is also connected with the stomach. When the vagus nerve in the stomach is stimulated it sympathetically stimulates the vagus nerve in the lungs.

The next practice, *vastra dhauti*, cleansing with cloth, is more powerful. A long cloth bandage is taken, and eaten just

like chocolate; it goes in with a little salt. It passes through the oesophagus, enters the stomach and awakens the vagus nerve. There is a sympathetic reaction in the lungs. The mucus that was sticking to the cavity of the lungs is forced to come out. This is the most powerful practice for asthma. It must be learned from an expert teacher.

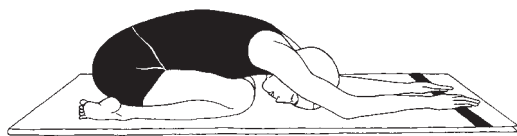
Pranayama must also be practised. This is how yoga can help asthmatics.

How does shashankasana help prevent an asthma attack?

Swami Satyananda: Within the physical body there are rich sources of life-giving chemicals, such as antibodies and adrenalin. When one of them is needed, it is given from outside in the form of pills, serum or injections. However, if the particular system that produces these chemicals can be revitalized, it can be made in the body. This can be accomplished through yoga.

Take the example of adrenalin. The patient suffering from asthma can produce his own adrenalin by simply practising a posture known as shashankasana. The person sits on his feet, bends forward, places his forehead and arms on the floor and relaxes in this position for ten or fifteen minutes. This is the way Muslims sit during their prayers.

In shashankasana the adrenal glands are activated, they secrete more adrenalin and the attack passes off. This is especially effective if practised early in an asthma attack, as soon as the person knows that respiratory congestion is beginning. An asthmatic knows very well if an attack is coming. The condition begins to develop from the morning, with a feeling of heaviness in the chest. With the practice of shashankasana, the feeling quickly improves.



Shashankasana

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This is an example of how, by the practice of specific yoga postures, endocrine glands are stimulated. The endocrine glands in turn influence not only the body, but also the emotions, such as anxiety, fear and anger, which can likewise be controlled by yoga.

Why does kunjaj relieve asthma?

Swami Satyananda: Asthmatics find kunjaj an excellent practice. Although there is no obvious connection between the lungs and the stomach, for a number of reasons, kunjaj does bring relief. This is confirmed by the large blobs of phlegm which are thrown out by asthmatics during kunjaj. The warmth and salinity of the water thins the mucus, making it easier to expel. There is also stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system, causing the bronchii to become wider. This allows mucus to come out and air to come in. With the removal of blockages in the respiratory passages, kunjaj brings great relief to the asthma sufferer by allowing him to breathe more easily.

People who suffer from asthma can and should perform kunjaj when they are actually having an attack, as it terminates the spasm. In this case it is essential that the



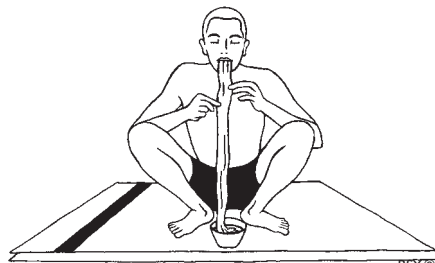
Kunjaj kriya

stomach is completely filled with water to obtain the best results. Though it may be difficult to drink the water down quickly due to shortage of breath, one must try; with determination it can be accomplished. The urge to vomit should be resisted, so that the stomach can be filled to the brim – bloated in fact. The bronchial tubes, which tighten and contract during an attack of asthma, relax as soon as the water is expelled. This brings much needed and instant relief.

Why is vastra dhauti particularly recommended for the relief of asthma?

Swami Niranjanananda: The practice of vastra dhauti affects the entire body and is a time-tested cure for people who suffer from kapha disorders or excess phlegm, such as asthmatics. It is essential for the prevention and cure of asthma.

It may be wondered why this practice is helpful, given that asthma is a disorder of the respiratory system, and vastra dhauti directly affects the digestive system. The answer lies in the fact that nerves and nadis link the digestive system with the lungs and brain. It should be remembered that the nervous system, including the brain, plays an important role in asthma. It is not just the respiratory system or the lungs that are affected.



Vastra dhauti

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How often should vastra dhauti be practised for the relief of asthma?

Swami Satyananda: Those who suffer from asthma can practise vastra dhauti daily for two weeks during times of acute attacks. After this, once a week is sufficient. It is simple but effective for both the prevention and cure of asthma. Many asthmatics gain relief using this practice.

When should one practise vastra dhauti rather than kunjla?

Swami Niranjanananda: Vastra dhauti is a stronger practice than kunjla and can sometimes improve conditions that are

beyond the scope of kunjla. However, it is also more difficult to perform. In the beginning this practice must be done under the guidance of a competent teacher.

When the cloth comes out, it is no longer thin, but quite thick, as it brings kapha or mucus with it. This does not always happen in kunjla. When the cloth is pulled out, it looks as if it is completely drenched in ghee, and feels slippery from top to bottom. The cloth wipes the walls of the stomach thoroughly, which enables digestive juices to be efficiently secreted.

Note: During the 1990s and 2000s the Yoga Research Foundation of the Bihar School of Yoga conducted significant research into the effects of yoga practices on asthma.



6

Hatha Yoga for Abdominal and Pelvic Health

ASANAS AND ABDOMINAL HEALTH

What is the effect of forward bending asanas on the abdominal organs?

Swami Satyananda: Forward bending asanas increase the intra-abdominal pressure in three ways:

1. By application of the thighs or heels against the front wall of the abdomen. This is only possible for those who can bend forwards sufficiently.
2. By general contraction of the abdominal muscles, particularly the rectus abdominis, brought about by bending in the abdominal region, and if the asanas are performed correctly, by contraction of the abdominal muscles during exhalation.
3. By deep abdominal breathing, which the practitioner is advised to do during the asanas. To allow an increased volume of air in the lungs, the diaphragm moves downwards and squeezes the abdominal organs. Normally the front wall of the abdomen simultaneously moves outwards; however during forward bending poses, this outward movement is restricted by the position of the thighs on the abdominal wall. The result is that the pressure inside the abdomen increases. Again, this is only effective when one bends forward enough for the thighs to press the abdomen.

The increased intra-abdominal pressure gives a profound massage to the internal organs and removes impure, sluggish blood. The overall result is an improvement in the tone of the organs by this enhanced blood circulation and a consequent removal of toxins. Supplementing these influences is the stimulation of the nerves which control the functioning of the abdominal organs. This further helps to ensure the optimum functioning of these organs.

What is the effect of forward bending asanas on the pelvic organs?

Swami Satyananda: In essentially the same way as the abdominal organs, the pelvic organs also benefit from the blood decongestion that takes place during forward bending asanas, the enriched blood supply after completion, and the stimulation of associated nerves, particularly the parasympathetic nerves emerging from the lower region of the spine. In this way, all the pelvic organs are encouraged to function normally and many ailments of this part of the body are relieved. The influence of the asanas on the prostate glands and gonads is notable.

What are the benefits of vajrasana to the abdominal region?

Swami Satyananda: Vajrasana alters the flow of blood and nervous impulses in the pelvic region and strengthens the pelvic muscles. It is a preventative measure against hernia and also helps to relieve piles. It reduces the blood flow to the genitals and massages the nerve fibres which feed them, making it useful in dilated veins of the testicles and hydrocele in men. It alleviates menstrual disorders. It increases the efficiency of the entire digestive system, relieving stomach ailments such as hyperacidity and peptic ulcer.

How does the breathing pattern in shashankasana benefit the abdominal region?

Swami Satyananda: In shashankasana, the deep breathing in the final position applies a gentle yet powerful massage

to the abdominal organs. This means it is useful in helping to remove and prevent various abdominal disorders such as constipation and indigestion.

How does practising trikonasana benefit the abdominal area?

Swami Sivananda: This asana tones the spinal nerves and the abdominal organs, increases peristalsis of the bowels and invigorates appetite. Constipation is relieved. The body becomes light.

How does practising bhujangasana benefit the abdominal area?

Swami Niranjanananda: This asana tones the ovaries and uterus and helps alleviate menstrual and other gynaecological disorders. It stimulates the appetite, alleviates constipation and is beneficial for all the abdominal organs, especially the liver and kidneys. The adrenal glands, situated on top of the kidneys, are also massaged and stimulated to work more efficiently. The secretion of cortisone is maintained and the thyroid gland is regulated.

Bhujangasana and its effects are described in *Gheranda Samhita* (2:42–43):

*Angushthanaabhiparyantamadhobhoomau cha vinyaset;
Dharaam karatalaabhyaam dhritvordhvasheersham
phaneeva hi.*

*Dehaagnirvarddhate nityam sarvarogavinaashanam;
Jaagarti bhujangeedeevee bhujangaasanasaadhanaat.*

Keep the body, from the toes to the navel, on the floor, and placing the palms of the hands also firmly on the floor, raise the head like a snake. This is called bhujangasana. The fire of the body increases, all diseases are destroyed and kundalini shakti is awakened by the practice of bhujangasana. (42–43)

How does practising dhanurasana benefit the abdominal area?

Swami Satyananda: Dhanurasana decongests the entire abdominal region and its organs. The liver, the multi-duty organ of digestion is massaged, resulting in improved digestion. The pancreas is toned, making it useful for yogic management of diabetes. The kidneys are stimulated, leading to improved fluid balance within the body, and the whole alimentary canal is toned. Blood is encouraged to flush through the whole system, having a cleansing effect. Dhanurasana also helps alleviate constipation, dyspepsia and excess fat.

What is the effect of halasana on the abdomen?

Swami Satyananda: Halasana strengthens the abdominal muscles, helping prevent abdominal sagging due to weak musculature. It assists the drainage of stagnant blood in the abdominal region, improving the functioning of the abdominal organs. The bending of the trunk in the abdominal region compresses the internal organs and increases the effectiveness of the massage to the organs due to the motion of the diaphragm. For these reasons, halasana helps to eliminate constipation and dyspepsia, and generally revitalizes organs such as the liver, spleen, kidneys, pancreas, and suprarenal glands.

Halasana is useful in normalizing the size of an enlarged liver and spleen, and in curing diabetes by prompting the pancreas to produce insulin. Many diseases and maladies have their origin in the abdomen. Therefore, halasana has beneficial effects on the whole body.

How does practising yogamudrasana benefit the abdominal area?

Swami Satyananda: Yogamudrasana, the psychic union pose, is particularly useful for massaging the abdominal organs and helping to remove various associated ailments. The upturned heels apply pressure to the inner organs. The blood flow to

the legs is reduced and thereby diverted to the abdominal and pelvic region, contributing to the functioning of the associated organs.

How does practising baddha padmasana benefit the abdominal area?

Swami Sivananda: Many diseases are cured by baddha padmasana. Chronic diseases of the stomach, liver, spleen and intestines that are pronounced incurable by allopaths and Ayurvedic practitioners are cured by a steady practice of this asana. There is no doubt about this.

Diseases of the stomach such as chronic gastritis, dyspepsia, flatulence, colic, dysentery, constipation, acidity, belching, and chronic lumbago are removed. Enlargement of the spleen and liver is cured. Torpidity of liver disappears. Baddha padmasana has a potent influence on the manipura chakra behind the navel and stimulates it, causing a great deal of energy to be drawn upward.

How does practising ardha matsyendrasana benefit the abdominal area?

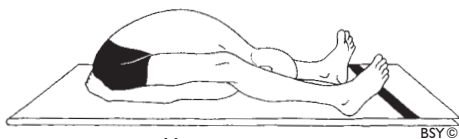
Swami Satyananda: This asana acts predominantly on the abdomen and the spine by applying a powerful torsion to the trunk of the body. The organs in the abdomen are alternately compressed and stretched, the compression being partly applied by the pressure of the thigh against the abdomen. This gives the organs a good massage, recirculates impure blood, and tones associated nerves.

Ardha matsyendrasana has been found useful for helping treat all manner of ailments, including diabetes, indigestion, rheumatism and constipation. In the case of constipation, it is important that the body is first of all twisted to the right, because faecal matter travels up the ascending colon along the transverse colon, and then downwards in the descending colon before being expelled from the body. This means that an initial twist to the right followed by a left twist compresses the colon and activates the nerves associated with intestinal

peristalsis in the same order as the progressive movement of faecal matter.

How does practising koormasana benefit the abdominal area?

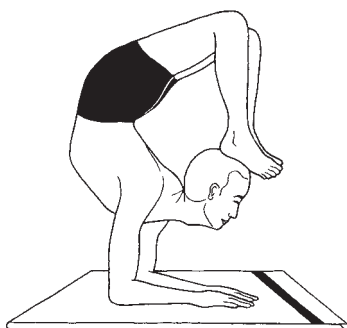
Swami Niranjanananda: Koormasana tones all the organs of the abdomen and is helpful in managing diabetes, flatulence and constipation.



Koormasana

What are the effects of vrischikasana on the abdomen?

Swami Satyananda: The influences of vrischikasana, scorpion pose, on the abdomen are essentially the same as for all inverted poses, but the accentuated curvature of the body in the abdominal region increases the internal pressure. This, together with the diaphragmatic motion, accentuates the abdominal massage. Further, though all the inverted poses encourage the drainage of stagnant blood from the abdominal organs, the increased intra-abdominal pressure experienced in vrischikasana further improves this expulsion of blood.



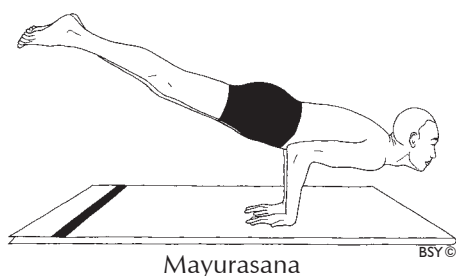
Vrischikasana

The general effect is improvement in the efficiency of the abdominal organs, removal of constipation, indigestion and other abdominal disorders. The normally inaccessible kidneys and suprarenal glands are compressed by the curvature of the back and stimulated by the motion of the diaphragm. This improves their functioning, enhancing the

purification of blood and elimination of urine by the kidneys, and normalizing the action of the suprarenal glands. These glands influence a person's emotional state by the secretion of the hormone adrenalin.

How does practising mayurasana benefit the abdominal area?

Swami Satyananda: Mayurasana massages and stimulates all the digestive organs. It is useful for treating diabetes, constipation, flatulence, sluggishness in the liver and kidneys, etc. Mayurasana stimulates the process of waste removal from the bowels. It is a useful asana for many types of digestive ailments and helps to keep the digestive system in good working order.



How does practising sirshasana benefit the abdominal organs?

Swami Satyananda: Sirshasana revitalizes the pelvic and abdominal organs, improving their associated functions: digestion, elimination, etc., and can help to remove related ailments. The drainage of blood from these organs is increased by the deep breathing and the massage from the diaphragm acting upwards against the weight of the organs. This action squeezes out the blood.

During inverted asanas, the abdominal and pelvic organs are able to free-float within the body. This has a decongestant effect and improves their functioning.

SHATKARMAS AND ABDOMINAL HEALTH

How does kapalbhati benefit the abdominal region?

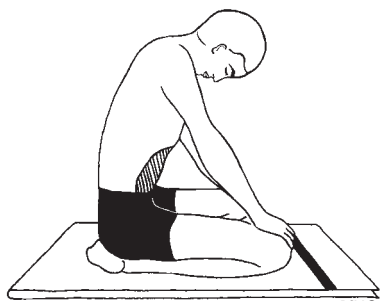
Swami Niranjanananda: Kapalbhati activates the muscles involved in exhalation, mainly the abdominal muscles, thus increasing the blood flow to them. At the same time, the digestive organs are activated, massaged and strengthened.

Why is agnisar kriya an important practice for the abdominal organs?

Swami Satyananda: Abdominal malfunctions are common, often due to lack of exercise and inadequate massage of the internal organs. Many people spend long periods of time sitting motionless doing office work, studying, watching television and other activities that require little or no physical effort. This leads to laziness and sluggishness of the entire body, including the abdominal organs. For this reason, the organs become inefficient and unable to perform their basic functions properly, leading to general bad health, whether conspicuous or inconspicuous.

In the case of the abdominal organs, sluggishness leads to indigestion, constipation, kidney and liver problems and various other common abdominal ailments. There

may be other factors involved, but certainly inefficiency of the organs is a major one. Agnisar kriya is a powerful method of counteracting this condition, for it vigorously contracts and expands the abdomen, giving the internal organs the massage and exercise required to carry out their functions in the best way.



Agnisar kriya

Why should nauli kriya be practised?

Swami Sivananda: Nauli kriya is intended for regenerating, invigorating and stimulating the abdominal organs and

the gastrointestinal system. Nauli kriya eradicates chronic constipation, dyspepsia and all other diseases of the gastrointestinal system. The liver and pancreas are toned, and the kidneys and other organs of the abdomen function properly.

Nauli is an ideal pick-me-up, and a blessing to humanity. If yogic exercises are done in the right way with the right mental attitude, they lead to spiritual growth. In *Hatharatnavali* (1:33) it is written:

Tundaargni sandeepana paachanaadi sandeepikaanandakaree sadaiva;

Ashesha doshaamayashoshanee cha hathakriyaamauliriyam cha naulih.

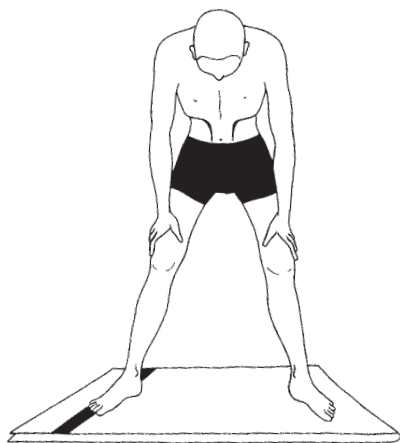
Nauli, the crown of hatha practices, makes the gastric fire blaze up, improves digestion etc., invariably brings a feeling of wellbeing and completely destroys all disorders and diseases.

What are the health benefits of nauli kriya?

Swami Satyananda: Nauli increases the general vitality of the body. It removes abdominal disorders and strengthens intestinal peristalsis. It checks and restores intestinal flexibility and tone.

Nauli is a beneficial practice for women and does not interfere with reproductive functions. The correct practice of nauli may rectify a displaced uterus; madhyama nauli is beneficial for the condition where the uterus is slightly tilted.

Nauli kriya sets right disorders of the stomach, and rectifies any weakness in the



Nauli

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peristaltic movements. Worms of the stomach and intestines can also be expelled by the practice of nauli. Nauli helps alleviate diabetes by improving the efficiency of the pancreas and improves blood circulation. It prevents hernia, which is caused by weak and inefficient abdominal muscles. Nauli strengthens these muscles, preventing hernia. If one already suffers from hernia, nauli should not be practised.

Other shatkarmas and asanas stimulate the digestion, but nauli is said to be the best for this. It quickly tones the abdominal muscles, nerves, intestines, reproductive, excretory and urinary organs: the entire internal system is stimulated by this practice. When the abdominal muscles are manipulated, not only are they toned, but all the internal organs are massaged. In *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (2:34) it states:

*Mandaagnisandeepanapaachanaadisandhaapikaanandakaree
sadaiva;*

*Asheshadoshaamayashoshanee cha hathakriyaa mauliriyam cha
naulih.*

Nauli is foremost of the hatha yoga practices. It kindles the digestive fire, removing indigestion, sluggish digestion, and all disorders of the doshas, and brings about happiness.

Asana and pranayama practice definitely generate energy, but nauli activates the system in a much shorter time and with greater force. Its effects are particularly noticeable on the digestive and excretory systems. It generates heat in the body, stimulates digestion, assimilation and absorption, thereby reducing excretion. It balances the endocrine system and helps control the production of sex hormones.

Nauli speeds up blood circulation and reduces blood stagnation. It is especially useful for alleviating constipation, indigestion, nervous diarrhoea, acidity, flatulence, depression, hormonal imbalances, sexual and urinary disorders, laziness, dullness, lack of energy and emotional disturbances.

Its practice helps control the appetite and sensual desires. Nauli also strengthens willpower. With these attainments, the practitioner definitely finds deeper satisfaction within.

THE DIGESTIVE AND EXCRETORY SYSTEMS

Why is maintaining a healthy digestive system so important in hatha yoga?

Swami Niranjanananda: Emphasis is laid on the cleanliness of the internal organs in all the shatkarma practices, especially those of dhauti. According to yoga, seventy-five per cent of diseases in the human body are caused by disorders in the digestive system, so in the shatkarma practices of dhauti, the emphasis has been on correcting the digestive system.

There are other causes of ill health such as environmental pollution and bacterial infection, but most health complaints are compounded by problems in the digestive system. If the abdominal organs become weak, food cannot be digested efficiently and constipation, diarrhoea, or liver upsets often occur.

How can vajrasana be used to assist digestion?

Swami Satyananda: Vajrasana is an important posture, particularly for those with poor digestion. Practise vajrasana directly after meals for at least five minutes to enhance digestive function. In cases of acute digestive disorder, sit in vajrasana and practise abdominal breathing for one hundred breaths before and after food. Do not strain.

Practising vajrasana for twenty minutes without moving the body is a wonderful experience. It's a bit difficult in the beginning – in the initial stages it is difficult to practice for just one minute, but by gradual practice it can be held for twenty minutes.

How do forward bending asanas assist digestion?

Swami Satyananda: The digestive organs, especially the intestines and liver, require a good flow of blood to ensure

that the nourishment from food is absorbed by the blood and distributed to all parts of the body. Both these organs are especially liable to blood congestion and the forward bending poses help remove this condition.

Auxiliary organs associated with the digestive process are also beneficially influenced. The pancreas, for example, which provides various digestive juices, is encouraged to secrete sufficient amounts to ensure the optimum breakdown of food into a manageable condition for absorption into the blood flowing to the intestines. The secretion of digestive juices is controlled by a balance between the operation of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. This is also beneficially influenced. Thus these poses act on the nerves and the pancreas, assisting production of the correct amounts of digestive juice and helping to eliminate indigestion.

The gastric juice supply to the stomach is stimulated by the vagus nerve, originating in the brain, and by hormones secreted from glands in the lower part of the stomach. Forward bending poses regulate to a greater or lesser degree the hormonal secretion and so in turn the production of gastric juice is balanced.

Further, forward bending poses have a particular influence on the liver. One of the many functions of the liver is the production of bile, which is essential for the digestion of fats. These asanas help to ensure that sufficient bile is produced, enhancing the digestive process.

What is the effect of inverted asanas on the digestive and excretory systems?

Swami Satyananda: By modifying blood circulation, inverted poses improve digestion. The relevant organs are decongested and consequently perform their duties more effectively. The decongestion of the liver reduces the impediment to blood flow through the digestive organs and so enhances the digestive process by an increased blood flow. The removal of stagnant blood is also assisted by the massage that the

liver receives from the diaphragm. The effective blood volume pumped by the heart is increased, mainly due to the recirculation of previously stagnant blood, and so the organs receive a still greater blood supply.

Thus inverted poses, besides relieving indigestion, can improve the supply of nourishment to the whole body, improving its general functioning and health.

The urinary organs, particularly the kidneys, and the large intestines, are also decongested and receive an enhanced blood supply during inverted poses. In this way, inefficient activity of the faecal organs, especially a weak peristaltic action connected with constipation, and urinary problems, can be relieved by regular inversion of the body.

What are the benefits of pranayama for the abdominal organs?

Swami Niranjanananda: The organs of digestion, absorption and elimination benefit from regular practice of pranayama. The stomach, pancreas, liver, bowels and kidneys are all exercised in pranayama through the massage given by the accentuated movement of the diaphragm and abdominal muscles. All the associated muscles and nerves are toned and rendered healthier.

What is the effect of the bandhas on the digestive and excretory systems?

Swami Satyananda: The digestive system is toned, massaged and revitalized due to the pressure exerted on the internal organs; harmony in the activity of the uro-genital system occurs as a result of reflex action via the nervous system.

Does yoga help peptic ulcers?

Swami Satyananda: When the Bihar School of Yoga was started in 1964 there were twenty-four students and one of them was suffering from peptic ulcer. He was a brilliant advocate and an astute politician. In the beginning his ulcer was serious and it was hard to imagine how yoga could help

a condition that was caused by hyperacidity, anxiety, fear and irregular lifestyle. To everyone's surprise, that man got better in fifteen or twenty days, and he is all right, even now.

For peptic ulcers, yoga nidra and concentration should be practised. After some time, introduce pawanmuktasana parts one and two. In the advanced stage, practise agnisar kriya, pumping of the abdomen. It improves the imbalanced digestive secretions. At the same time the dietary habits must be improved, including the quality of food and the time taken to eat it. The temperament and nature also have a bearing on gastric and peptic ulcers, so they must be taken into account.

What is the effect of forward bending asanas on obesity?

Swami Satyananda: Obese people experience more difficulty than others in performing the forward bending poses to any degree of proficiency. However, they should persevere no matter how little they can bend their body forwards as these asanas are extremely effective in removing fat, particularly in the abdominal region.

Additionally, by strengthening the abdominal muscles and especially the rectus abdominis muscles, a sagging and protruding abdomen, including the internal organs, is encouraged to return to its normal shape.

The dynamic form of pada hastasana is especially recommended for removing obesity and protrusion of the abdomen.

How does the practice of yoga asanas help with weight reduction?

Swami Satyananda: People have time for everything, they have money for everything, but not for life-saving yoga. It must be remembered that with obesity, food is not the only the cause; a process of thinking is the cause behind it. That process of thinking eliminates certain processes of digestion in the system. *Chitta* and *prana*, the mental and life forces, have to be balanced through the practices of yoga. This is a vital point.

To accomplish this, one starts with the practice of yoga asanas. They are of major importance as these yogic postures create certain effects and influences throughout the nervous systems, endocrinal system and psychic centres of the body.

For example, if one is overweight and practices paschimottanasana, it is wrong to think that the movement of the waist, thighs and stomach is accelerating the metabolism of fat. No. Paschimottanasana balances the hormonal secretions, producing a balance in the metabolic functions of the body. This is how weight reduction occurs.

Why is it important to clean the intestines?

Swami Niranjanananda: Most people never clean their intestines. It is well known that if one does not drink enough water, faeces build up in the large intestine, becoming dry and hard and causing constipation. When a bowel action finally occurs, the delicate lining of the intestine, bowel or anus may be scratched by the hard stool, which can be painful and even cause bleeding.

However, even drinking several litres of water daily does not fully clean the stomach and intestines. The water is absorbed through the intestinal walls and flows through the bloodstream to the kidneys where it is excreted as urine. As the water does not pass through the intestines, decaying matter remains trapped in the crevices of the intestines and can cause disease. Shankhaprakshalana overcomes this problem and is a simple cure for constipation. In *Gheranda Samhita* (1:17–18) it is written:

*Aakantham poorayedvaari vaktrena cha pibechchhanaih;
Chaalayedudarenaiva chodaraadrechayedadhah.*

*Vaarisaram param gopyam dehanirmalakaarakam;
Saadhayettatprayatnena devadeham prapadyate.*

Drink water slowly through the mouth up to the throat. The abdomen is then moved and the water evacuated through the anus. (17)

The technique of varisara dhauti is most secret. It purifies the body. A yogi who perfects this technique attains a divine body. (18)

Shankhaprakshalana makes the body clean and pure. It is the best practice for purification of wastes and disorders of the digestive system. Sage Gheranda says that a yogi who perfects this technique attains *devadeham* – a divine, lustrous, brilliant and light body like that of a god. Through this practice the body can be kept free from all types of diseases.

What types of dhauti are for cleansing the digestive system?

Swami Satyananda: There are six major dhautis for cleansing the alimentary canal: *vaman dhauti*, also known as *kunjal*, is washing the stomach by means of vomiting; *vyaghra dhauti* is the technique for a loaded stomach; *varisara dhauti*, popularly known as *shankhaprakshalana*, is a method of cleaning the entire alimentary canal from mouth to anus; *vatsara*, or *vayu dhauti* is a process of cleaning the stomach by air; *agnisara dhauti* is a technique to stimulate the spiritual heat of the body by stimulating the digestive fire and the serpent fire. *Agni* means fire.

What are the benefits of practising antar dhauti?

Swami Sivananda: Those who do any form of *antar dhauti*, internal cleansing, have no need of purgatives or laxatives. They never suffer from indigestion or constipation.

What is the purpose of practising vatsara dhauti?

Swami Niranjanananda: Vatsara dhauti cleanses the stomach and intestines by using air. Just as accumulated dust and dirt can be removed by blowing air or using suction, similarly, in the practice of vatsara dhauti air is introduced into the stomach, expelling toxic or foul-smelling gases and wind, and stimulating the digestive system.

In *Gheranda Samhita* (1:16) it says,

*Vaatsaaram param gopyam deha nirmalakaarakam;
Sarva rogashayakaram dehaanavivarddhakam.*

Vatsara is a very secret technique for purifying the body. It destroys all diseases and activates the gastric fire, which helps to digest food.

Dehanirmalakaarakam, vatsara kriya makes the body clean internally. *Nirmala* means pure, sacred. A pure body results in good health. Many diseases are associated with digestive problems. Restoring balance to the digestive system benefits overall wellbeing.

Sarvarogakshayakaram dehaanavivarddhakam, this practice destroys all diseases and increases the effectiveness of the digestive fire by enhancing the chemical reactions in the stomach. It expels unwanted gases from the stomach, regulates the production of gastric juices, mucus and acid, and removes irritation and pain caused by acidity in the stomach and oesophagus. If the digestive system is functioning well, digestive juices are produced in the right quantity, excretion of faeces becomes regular and many health problems such as constipation, diarrhoea, peptic ulcers and reflux (heartburn) are reduced.

What is varisara dhauti?

Swami Satyananda: Varisara dhauti is a method of cleaning the entire alimentary canal from the mouth to the anus with warm saline water. It is popularly known as *shankha-prakshalana*. Five litres or more of water are drunk and evacuated through the anus. It is a process that must be learned from an expert.

Ancient yogis, such as Sage Gheranda, named this technique of stomach and intestinal wash, *varisara*. *Vari* means water in both Sanskrit and Hindi. *Sara* means ‘with essence’, or ‘pertaining to’. In the term shankhaprakshalana, the word *shankha*, meaning ‘conch’, is used, as the shape of the stomach is shaped like the conch. *Shalana* means ‘to wash’. *Prakshalana* means ‘to wash completely’.

How can both the small and large intestines be cleansed?

Swami Niranjanananda: The practice of shankhaprakshalana cleans both the small and large intestines. Shankhaprakshalana is the modern method of varisara dhauti, in the sense that it is acceptable to all and can be practised by everyone, providing there is an awareness of the appropriate climatic and dietary restrictions that have to be followed after the practice.

There are two variations of this practice. One is called *laghoo shankhaprakshalana*, the short form, in which six glasses of warm saline water are drunk, two at a time, followed by the performance of five asanas which loosen up the intestines and allow the water to pass through. The second variation is called *poorna shankhaprakshalana*, the full form, in which a total of sixteen or more glasses of water are drunk in combination with the practice of the same specified asanas. The saline water flushes the whole system by creating pressure, and thoroughly cleans out all the accumulated particles from the intestines. This process also removes the entire mucous lining from the intestine, which makes the digestive system highly sensitive and also increases mental sensitivity.

The effects of shankhaprakshalana include stimulation of the nervous system, improvement of the digestive function, elimination of toxins from the entire system and sensitization of the nadis that link the chakras together. The state of physical purification also helps the pranamaya kosha to reorganize and restructure the flow of prana in the body. The increased sensitivity in the mind and energy is due to the effect of the practice on the pranic body. For this reason many people are physically tired after performing shankhaprakshalana, but still have a lot of energy within them. There is no heaviness in the body; the whole body feels light, as if it is floating.

What are the benefits of practising shankhaprakshalana?

Swami Satyananda: Shankhaprakshalana is the best exercise of hatha yoga. Those who practise it have an aura that

shines brilliantly. It purifies the body, eliminates all toxins from the stomach and cleans the whole alimentary canal. It also dispels the three types of worms from the intestine. Constipation is cleared and diabetes can be cured by this practice. It helps to cure almost all stomach troubles by regulating the vitiated bile, wind and mucus. Shankhaprakshalana cleans the stomach completely; the body becomes light and free from tension.

What are the effects of excess mucus in the intestines?

Swami Satyananda: When the intestines are loaded with decomposed mucus, intestinal peristalsis slows down. When this occurs, decomposition and fermentation of foodstuffs takes place inside the intestines. This means that during the process of assimilation, the body absorbs toxins and the whole body becomes toxic.

What is laghoo shankhaprakshalana?

Swami Satyananda: The Sanskrit word *laghoo* means 'short', 'condensed' or 'concise'. The word *shankha* means 'conch' or 'shell' and *prakshalana* means 'to wash' or 'to clean thoroughly'. The word shankha is intended to represent and describe the intestine, with its cavernous and coiled shape. Therefore, the term *laghoo shankhaprakshalana* means, the short intestinal wash.

Do laghoo and poorna shankhaprakshalana have different purposes?

Swami Satyananda: The two practices have slightly different purposes: poorna shankhaprakshalana is intended to completely empty and clean the whole digestive system, whereas laghoo shankhaprakshalana is only intended to encourage normal functioning of the intestines.

What are the benefits of laghoo shankhaprakshalana?

Swami Satyananda: People with digestive problems such as constipation, flatulence, acidity, indigestion and other

digestive maladies are advised to practise this technique. Laghoo shankhaprakshalana is an excellent method of purifying the body, and of preventing or helping to remove a diverse number of ailments.

Expert guidance should be sought to find out whether it will help to remove particular ailments.

What is vaman dhauti?

Swami Satyananda: *Vaman dhauti* is cleaning the digestive tract from the stomach to the mouth by means of vomiting. Both *kunjla* and *vaman* mean ‘vomiting’; *kriya* means ‘practice’ and *dhauti* means ‘wash’.

There are generally three ways *vaman dhauti* can be done. In *kunjla kriya* water is drunk on an empty stomach and regurgitated by rubbing the back of the tongue. In *vyaghra kriya* water is drunk three to four hours after eating and the contents of the stomach are then regurgitated. In *gaja karani*, water is drunk on an empty stomach and regurgitated by contracting the upper abdomen while simultaneously inhaling.

What are the different types of vaman dhauti?

Swami Niranjanananda: The most commonly practised types of *vaman dhauti* are: *kunjla kriya* and *vyaghra kriya*. *Kunjla kriya* is done on an empty stomach and *vyaghra kriya* is done after meals. *Kunjla kriya* is done when one feels normal and healthy. *Vyaghra kriya* should be practised when there is a disorder or discomfort in the stomach.

How can vomiting be beneficial to health?

Swami Satyananda: Vomiting is normally the last resort of the stomach to throw out impure, excessively rich or heavy food. It is a natural physical process, but only as a last resort. To purposely vomit is in a sense unnatural, but experience has shown that it is an effective way to improve the functioning of the stomach and in turn the whole physical body.

If the stomach was treated with more care it would not be necessary to do kunjal kriya, but sadly, most people mistreat their stomachs. It is under these circumstances that intentional vomiting becomes most useful as a means of removing the impurities that contaminate the body.

Who should practise vaman dhauti?

Swami Satyananda: The stomach should be kept clean and in the healthiest possible condition if it is to retain its efficiency and remain free from disease. Kunjal kriya creates this clean, healthy condition, as well as removing acidity. It is therefore a panacea both for those who have digestive ailments and those who want to maintain good health.

Vaman dhauti is especially beneficial for persons suffering from asthma, bronchitis and acidity. Those who want to practise meditation but find their progress interrupted by acidity should use this practice.

How does kunjal kriya help the digestive system?

Swami Niranjanananda: Kunjal kriya helps a healthy person to remain free from disease. It cleans the upper digestive tract, has a profound effect on the nervous system, and is therefore beneficial for general health. It is especially useful for people suffering from kapha and pitta disorders.

This practice washes the digestive system from stomach to mouth, helping remove and prevent diseases caused by the accumulation of toxic matter and general impurities in this region. It helps eradicate bad breath, phlegm in the throat and some types of sore throat. Salty water reduces the secretion of acid by the glands in the stomach, enhancing the stomach's digestive efficacy.

Why is kunjal so effective for relieving stomach problems?

Swami Satyananda: There are various causes of stomach problems – eating too much food, eating food that is too rich, bad or impure, as well as oversecretion of gastric juices, particularly acid, due to emotional upsets or sustained stress.

Kunjal cannot change one's food habits or remove mental and emotional tension. It can, however, help to keep the stomach in good order by washing it clean of impurities. The salt water also reduces the secretion of acid from the glands in the stomach. These glands become more efficient with the practice of kunjal, improving digestion.

All these effects help prevent indigestion and allow the best possible assimilation of nutrients, as well as eliminating other digestive ailments. Whenever one feels a little queasy in the stomach, perhaps early in the morning, kunjal is recommended to bring relief.

There is another reason that kunjal is so beneficial. There is a tendency for the residue of undigested food to lie in the bottom of the stomach once all the easily digested food has passed into the intestines. This is particularly so if one has a distended stomach, for the bottom of the stomach is more than likely below the level of the outlet to the intestines. This acts as a reservoir in which fermentation takes place. When the next meal is eaten this residue mixes with incoming food and can pass into the intestines, possibly contaminating and poisoning the system, as much of it will be absorbed into the bloodstream from the intestines. Kunjal kriya throws this fermented waste out of the stomach before it can cause harm. As such kunjal is a sure way of preventing auto-poisoning of the body.

Kunjal gives relief from biliousness. If the expelled water is green, it indicates the presence of bile. The bile is secreted from the gall bladder into the intestines but often finds its way up into the stomach, especially if it is oversecreted. Kunjal brings wonderful relief by eliminating the accumulation of this nauseating and bitter-tasting bile.

What is vyaghra kriya?

Swami Satyananda: Vaman dhauti or *vyaghra kriya* is the second practice of hrid dhauti. Vaman is 'to vomit', vyaghra is 'tiger'. In this practice the food from the stomach is vomited three hours after a meal. This practice is also

called *baghi kriya*. Both *vyaghra* and *baghi* mean ‘tiger’. This technique is therefore known as the tiger action of regurgitation. It is a similar practice to *kunjal* but a large portion of semi-digested food as well as water is expelled from the stomach.

When should vyaghra kriya be practised?

Swami Niranjanananda: The only purpose of *vyaghra kriya* is to expel undigested food. It should be done only when necessary. According to yoga, food should pass through the stomach within three hours of eating. If this has not happened, the food is regarded as indigestible and should be thrown out by expulsion. If the food is rotten or the stomach is gorged beyond capacity, the practice can be done earlier. Animals such as lions, tigers and dogs are known to gorge themselves and regurgitate whatever is indigestible.

What is vastra dhauti?

Swami Satyananda: The word *vastra* means ‘cloth’ and *dhauti* means ‘cleansing’ or ‘washing’. Therefore, *vastra dhauti* is a technique for cleaning the throat, oesophagus and stomach with a length of cloth dipped in saline water. It is also known by various other names. These include: *vas dhauti*, washing with a cloth, *dhauti kriya*, cleansing technique and *dhauti karma*, cleaning technique.

It is a useful method for removing excess acid or mucus from the stomach. *Vastra dhauti* is described in *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (2:24):

*Chaturangulavistaaram hastapanchadashaayatam;
Guroopadishtamaargena siktam vastram shanaigraset;
Punah pratyaaharechchaitaduditam dhauti karma tat.*

A strip of wet cloth, four angulas wide (seven to eight centimetres) and fifteen handspans (one and a half metres) in length is slowly swallowed and then taken out, as instructed by the guru. This is known as *dhauti*.

Vastra dhauti must only be practised under expert guidance and in full accordance with the instructions given. Those who practise varisara dhauti need not do vastra dhauti.

What are the health benefits of vastra dhauti?

Swami Satyananda: The cloth thoroughly scrubs the stomach walls. It stimulates the digestive juices and peristalsis, and invigorates the entire body. It is useful in treating acidity, indigestion, bronchitis and asthma.

For maximum benefit, kunjla kriya and jala neti should be performed after completing vastra dhauti. Vastra dhauti scrapes the impurities from the walls, while kunjla expels them from the body. Jala neti tones up the nasal system.

What is the purpose of practising vastra dhauti?

Swami Niranjanananda: Vastra dhauti is a method of cleaning the throat, oesophagus and stomach with a length of cloth. Even though the practice is difficult, it remains prevalent due to its many benefits. Sage Gheranda says that this technique cures kapha and pitta disorders and is also useful for kidney problems, leprosy and skin infections. It is especially effective for those who suffer from asthma. In *Gheranda Samhita* (1:41) it is written:

*Gulma jvarapleehaakushthakaphapittam vinashyati;
Aarogyam balapushtishcha bhavettasya dine dine.*

The practice of vastra dhauti rectifies skin problems, fever, enlarged spleen, leprosy and kapha (phlegm) and pitta (bile) disorders. It keeps the body free of disease, increases stamina and cheerfulness, and promotes healthy growth.

Vastra dhauti is also described in *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*.

Many people begin yoga due to interest in improving their health through its cleansing practices. For both Yogi Swatmarama and Sage Gheranda, however, their real aim in teaching these practices is as part of yoga sadhana,

preparing the practitioner for pranayama and higher practices.

How does agnisara kriya benefit the digestive system?

Swami Niranjanananda: Agnisara kriya promotes the correct secretion of digestive juices and allows optimum assimilation of nutrients from food. Stomach worms can also be destroyed. It prevents and removes disorders of the digestive system such as constipation, indigestion, hyperacidity, hypoacidity, irritable bowel syndrome, pitta imbalance and flatulence. Agnisara kriya balances the abdominal organs.

What is basti?

Swami Satyananda: Basti is a hatha yoga method of cleaning the colon by sucking in air or water through the anus. It is one of the shatkarmas that have been practised in India since time immemorial. It is a direct and obvious method of washing and purifying the bowels, yet strangely it is rarely taught by yoga teachers or mentioned in modern books on yoga.

Why is basti known as a yogic enema?

Swami Niranjanananda: Basti is a simple practice for washing and purifying the intestines. It is like a yogic enema, as air or water is sucked in through the anus in order to clean the large intestine.

The water does not enter the small intestine, but remains in the large intestine. After some time the water is expelled, just as in a regular enema. The only difference is that in an enema a tube is used. Basti is more natural and more appropriate. In *Hatharatnavali* (1:41–44), the two types of basti are described:

*Vastistu dvividhaa proktaa jalavaayu prabhedatah;
Chakrim kritvaa yathaashaktyaa vastinchaiva tu kaarayet.*

*Vaayumaakunchya jathare gudanaale visarjayet;
Vaayuvastiriyam proktaa jalavasti matho bruve.*

Atha jalavastih

*Naabhidadhne jale sthitvaa paayunaale sthitaangulih;
Chakrimaargena jatharam paayunaalena poorayet.*

*Vichitrakaraneem kritvaa nirbheeto rechayejalam;
Yaavadbalam pooryaiva kshanam sthitvaa virechayent.*

Basti is said to be of two types: water and air. After doing chakrikarma according to the best of one's effort, one should practise basti. (41)

Collecting air in the stomach, release it through the lower passage (anus). Vayu basti is explained. Now I will speak about jala basti. (42)

Now jala basti:

Standing in water up to the navel region, put the finger in the passage of the anus. Through the chakri process, the stomach should be filled with water through the anus. (43)

Then, after doing vichitra karani, one should draw out the water without fear. Draw the water according to your strength, wait for some moments then expel it. (44)

What are the health benefits of practising jala basti?

Swami Sivananda: Jala basti cures urinary disorders, dyspepsia, disorders of digestion, diseases of the bowels, and diseases arising from an excess of wind, bile and phlegm. This kriya should be done in the morning when the stomach is empty. In *Hatharatnavali* (1:46–47) it is written:

*Gulmapleehodaram vaapi vaatapittakaphaadikam;
Bastikarmaprabhaavena dhaavantyeva na samshayah.*

*Dhaatvindriyaantahkaranaprasaadam dadyaachcha kaantim
dahanapradeeptim;
Asheshadoshopachayam nihanyaadabhyasyamaanam
jalabasastikarma.*

Practice of basti karma certainly removes diseases like inflammation of the spleen, abdominal disorders and also disorders caused by the three humours of vata, pitta and kapha. (46)

Practice of jala basti streamlines the body constituents, brings about poise to the internal (sense) organs, offers brightness, stimulates digestive power and completely alleviates chronic disorders. (47)

What are the general benefits of intestinal cleansing with basti?

Swami Satyananda: Basti is the best method for cleansing the bowels and is a great help in reducing the occurrence of various types of disease as well as improving general health. It is generally believed that a large number of ailments originate in the colon, especially from impurities and malfunction. Actually most ailments arise in the mind, but certainly a congested colon or excessive toxins in the bowels can help to initiate ailments. Basti completely washes the bowel and removes excess bacteria, old stool, threadworms and heat from the lower intestines.

Basti stimulates the nerves of the colon as well as the nerves connecting other parts and organs of the digestive system. It also improves muscle tone and blood supply. Old stool and gas are removed and the blood is purified. Once basti has been practised and mastered it can be used occasionally for general health or to treat specific ailments such as constipation.

Basti cures digestive disorders and is particularly useful for removing constipation, stimulating sluggish digestion, controlling nervous diarrhoea and strengthening the solar plexus.

Most importantly, it pushes apana vayu upward. When the apana rises it can be felt in the navel region and as a great pressure on the stomach. In *Hatha Yoga Pradipka* (2:27–28) it is written:

*Gulmapleehodaram chaapi vaatapittakaphodbhavaah;
Bastikarma prabhaavena ksheeyante sakalaamayaah.*

*Dhaatvindriyaantahkaranaprasaadam daghaachcha kaantim
dahanapradeeptim;
Asheshadoshopachayam nihanyaadabhyasyamaanam
jalabastikarma.*

Enlargement of the glands and spleen, and all diseases arising from excess wind, bile and mucus are eliminated from the body through the practice of basti. (27)

By practising jala basti the appetite increases, the body glows, excess doshas are destroyed and the dhatu, senses and mind are purified. (28)

What is the best method for cleansing the large intestine?

Swami Niranjanananda: Basti is the best technique for cleansing the large intestine. In *Gheranda Samhita* (1:49) it is written:

*Evamabhyasayogena koshthadosho na vidyate;
Vivarddhayejjatharaagnimaamavaatam vinaashayet.*

It removes diseases of the stomach and bowels and enhances the digestive fire.

Evamabhyasayogena koshthadosho na vidyate, by this practice constipation is prevented in a yogi's body. Disorders of the stomach and intestines do not occur. *Vivarddhayejjatharaagnimaamavaatam vinaashayet*, diseases which manifest due to lack of digestive fire, like flatulence, indigestion, constipation, and pitta and kapha imbalances, are eradicated.

Basti enhances the energy and helps develop control over the abdominal muscles. To suck up water or air requires muscular control. There is a clear improvement in the health and capacity of the abdominal organs with this practice alone. Blood circulation takes place efficiently so that the

exchange of oxygen and waste is optimized, and the blood is purified. The internal organs are massaged, making the nadis healthy.

Why is it so important to be free of constipation?

Swami Satyananda: One must always be free of constipation. Constipation is the father of all disease. It is an ailment of sedentary modern life. It is caused by excessive worry and frustration and by insufficient exercise. It is caused by irregular toilet habits, straining, and stodgy food such as white bread and dumplings. There are other causes but these are the main ones. Sedentary life leads to insufficient blood flow and nervous stimulation of specific areas of the body. The body processes lose their strength and efficiency. In the case of constipation, it is the region of the large intestine that suffers.

The elimination of constipation is important as it has repercussions on other parts of the body. When the flow of faeces is constant, then the rest of the digestive tract will also work more efficiently. This is because the entire tract functions as a whole, even though each organ has a different name. It is an integrated system. If the process of defecation is normal, then the associated organs such as the liver and pancreas will also be able to work more easily and effectively. The whole system becomes less susceptible to ailments.

What yoga practices help constipation?

Swami Satyananda: Practise asanas every morning to help empty out the bowels. Many asanas are useful for constipation but the following are particularly recommended: *supta pawanmuktasana*, *utthanpadasana*, *kauva chalasana*, *surya namaskara*, *bhujangasana*, *marjari-asana* and *shalabhasana*. There are many more – in fact, most asanas are helpful for treating constipation.

There are various yogic practices that are specifically designed to clean out the digestive system. As such they are useful for relieving constipation. The most important

practices are shankhaprakshalana, basti, nauli, agnisar kriya and moola shodhana.

There are many people who have turned to yoga in order to rid themselves of constipation. Often this was as a last resort, every other method having failed. They have usually found great improvement in their condition.

The last point to remember is that chronic tension plays a vital role in constipation. One of the basic aims of yoga is to bring mental and emotional peace into one's life. As such, all practices of yoga including asanas, pranayama and meditation practices make an indirect contribution to removing constipation. Most commercial cures aim at removing the manifestation, namely physical constipation, whereas yoga aims at the root cause – mental and emotional constipation. If this more subtle form of constipation is removed, then the physical by-product will automatically disappear.

How does laghoo shankhaprakshalana compare with the action of laxatives?

Swami Satyananda: In laghoo shankhaprakshalana, the salt water acts as a lubricant and loosens the stool. Here is an analogy; when there is ingrained crust, stains or coating on the inside of a pot, the first treatment is to soak it for some time in hot water. This loosens up the encrustation, eventually allowing it to be removed easily. The salt water acts in a similar way within the intestines, leaving them clean and free from obstruction.

The salt water does not directly stimulate the nerves. Normally, it is movement and bulk of stool that acts as a trigger, stimulating the nerves which activate peristalsis. The salt water encourages the hardened or blocked stool to move, prompting the nerves to carry out their normal functions. No direct nerve stimulation is involved as it is with laxatives. A further point worth noting is that the salt water does not in itself lead to complete evacuation of the bowels, which is one of the major drawbacks associated with laxatives. Those

who are currently using some form of laxative are advised to adopt laghoo shankhaprakshalana.

What is the best treatment for severe constipation?

Swami Satyananda: If the constipation is serious, basti should be preceded by moola shodhana. This practice will remove hard stool. Water basti can then be used to thoroughly clean the bowels. Basti may also bring some relief from pruritis (itching of the anus).

How do forward bending asanas help relieve constipation?

Swami Satyananda: The forward bending poses are a boon to people who suffer from constipation, as by increasing the intra-abdominal pressure they physically stimulate the action of intestinal peristalsis. This is a series of wave-like motions in the intestines that encourage the faecal matter to move smoothly towards the anus for defecation.

Though constipation has many root causes such as lack of exercise, excessive anxiety and inadequate intake of water, the forward bending asanas attack the problem from various directions. The peristaltic action is stimulated, not only by the increased pressure in the abdomen, but also by the stimulation of the involuntary nerves in and surrounding the spine which control this function. Forward bending poses, as with other asanas, also bring about a general feeling of tranquillity, which in no small way contributes to the removal of constipation.

How can yoga help haemorrhoids?

Swami Satyananda: Haemorrhoids are a common ailment associated with constipation. It can develop directly from constipation and from coagulation of blood through bad circulation. This is related to lack of exercise and is similar to varicose veins.

For relief from haemorrhoids, inverted asanas are recommended to help drain the blood and stimulate circulation. *Ashwini mudra*, alternate contraction and

relaxation of the anal muscles, is also helpful. Fasting is recommended and moola shodhana should be regularly practised, taking special care and using some form of lubrication to encourage smooth movement. The lubricant also prevents the area becoming too dry. This dryness, which is most common in old age, leads to irritation and clogging of faeces in the rectum. If this clogging becomes serious, the whole system becomes totally blocked. This leads to ill health of the whole body. Therefore, moola shodhana is especially recommended for those people who suffer from constipation and haemorrhoids. Moola shodhana is a simple yet effective technique.

Is basti useful for the relief of haemorrhoids?

Swami Niranjanananda: People suffering from haemorrhoids should practise jala basti with care. Cold water should be used as it causes constriction of the blood vessels, which are dilated in haemorrhoids, and brings immediate relief. Many ailments of the anus benefit from basti.

What are the therapeutic benefits of ashwini mudra?

Swami Satyananda: Many people have weak anal muscles (sphincters). This is closely associated with such widespread ailments as constipation and piles (haemorrhoids). Ashwini mudra helps to stimulate intestinal peristalsis, the wave-like motion that propels the stool through the intestines to the anus for evacuation. It is, therefore, a great help in alleviating constipation and thus improving the general health and wellbeing of the practitioner.

Piles are characterized by an accumulation of blood in the anal region. The practice of ashwini mudra helps to squeeze this stagnant blood away from the anus. This process is intensified if the mudra is combined with sarvangasana. Ashwini mudra physically draws the blood away from the anus and sarvangasana allows the blood to drain downwards back to the heart. Every sufferer of piles should definitely practise this combination daily.

Those people who suffer from prolapse of the anus or rectum should also do ashwini mudra. By strengthening the associated muscles, these ailments will slowly disappear.

What is moola shodhana?

Swami Satyananda: The Sanskrit word *moola* literally means 'base' or 'root'. In this context, it means anus and rectum. The word *shodhana* means 'purification'. Therefore, *moola shodhana* can be translated as the practice which 'purifies the anus and rectum'.

This technique has various other common names. It is called *moola dhauti*, which means 'anal cleansing', and is also known as *chakrikarma*, which means the 'rotation practice'. It is so called because the finger is rotated within the anus and rectum.

Why is a turmeric root used in moola shodhana?

Swami Satyananda: Traditionally, a turmeric root is recommended for this practice. The tumeric plant is widely available in India and has great medicinal value as an antiseptic, blood purifier and general cleanser of physical impurities. It has astringent properties, which is the reason that it is used in moola shodhana. It tends to stimulate the nerves of the inside of the anus and rectum, which encourages bowel movement (peristalsis) and a free flow of blood. Thus it physically removes waste material and stimulates the natural function of the bowels.

Turmeric is not widely available in many countries, but one's finger can be used instead for moola shodhana. This is as good as turmeric, for although it is not astringent, there is more facility for manipulation.

Why should one practise moola shodhana?

Swami Niranjanananda: This practice is as useful as it is simple. The blood flow and the flow of energy through the nadis are increased, enabling the excretory system to function efficiently, and removing disorders, especially

of the anus and rectum. Hardened faeces are expelled. Daily cleansing of the bowels with this technique changes a person's attitude towards life, as it provides relief from the misery of constipation. Once constipation is cured, many other diseases subside. All the systems of the body are affected by blockages in the rectum, so keeping this passage clean with the practice of moola shodhana improves the health in many ways.

The main physical purpose of practising moola shodhana is to relieve constipation. In constipation, the faeces may become as hard as stone, and the exertion needed to pass the stool causes pain and often damages the lining of the rectum and anus. Such straining can also cause haemorrhoids. Moola shodhana is an effective way of bringing relief. By applying ghee or turmeric juice inside the rectum, hardened faeces can be expelled with greater ease. The hardened kernels are to some extent broken up into smaller pieces as they are expelled and the rectum is lubricated, so injury to the anus is avoided.

However, moola shodhana should be adopted only when constipation has become severe and chronic and there is no other option. Practices such as laghoo shankhaprakshalana which help prevent this condition should also be regularly employed. In shankhaprakshalana the faeces are excreted after having been softened with water. Moola shodhana is the final practice of dhauti.

In *Hatharatnavali* (1:29) it is written:

*Moolavyaadhigulmarogo nashyatyatra mahodarah;
Malashuddhirdeepanam cha jaayate chakrikarmanaa.*

Piles, diseases of the spleen and distended stomach are cured; evacuation of the bowels, and stimulation of the digestive fire take place through chakrikarma.

DIABETES

How does yoga help diabetes?

Swami Satyananda: What is the effect of yoga postures on diabetes? What is the effect of hatha yoga on the production of insulin and the capacity to produce insulin? It is taught in elementary science that the pancreas produces insulin and lack of insulin results in diabetes: yoga has gone far beyond that.

Yoga understands that it is the pancreas that is responsible for manifesting insulin but it is the nervous system which is responsible for creating or blocking the process. If one lives a life of stress and strain, shocks are experienced, and these shocks are transferred to the nervous system. As a result, the nervous system does not respond to the needs of the body and it may become incapable of producing the impulses responsible for producing insulin. It is not only applicable to the production of insulin, it is applicable to the production of every hormone in the body: when the impulses of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems are suppressed, the production of hormones is affected.

Sugar can aggravate it but sugar does not cause it. Food aggravates it, but does not cause it. It is therefore useless to just give up potato, sugar and rice. The cause is not being treated, the symptoms are being treated; it is not sufficient just to take insulin, as this only inserts a chemical which helps to sort out the problems of sugar. Why not revive the natural capacity of the nervous system so that the pancreas produces insulin? This is done through hatha yoga.

What research has been conducted into yoga for diabetes?

Swami Satyananda: There is plenty of evidence showing that diseases have been successfully treated with yoga. With my involvement, a scientific study on diabetes was conducted in India in 1967. It was organized by the Ministry of Health of the Government of Central India, and there were a number

of eminent medical men observing the whole process. The study was concluded after forty days. The cases were followed up for a few years. The conclusion was 67% success: 67% of the diabetics from that study led a regular life and could take normal food.

In one of the ashrams, another important study was conducted in the management of diabetes. It took forty days, under the direct observation of doctors. When the course was concluded, the patients went home and the doctors followed up their progress.

To sum up, this experiment enlightened the whole nation that diabetes is no more an incurable disease, and if properly managed before complications have set in, the pancreas can be regenerated and the disease can be checked. The sufferer from diabetes has nothing to worry about provided he knows the correct practices to do.

What is the effect of forward bending asanas on the production of insulin?

Swami Satyananda: Insulin, the hormone which regulates the level of blood sugar in the body, is secreted by the islets of Langerhans in the pancreas. This function is affected by forward bending asanas. Diabetics have improved their condition by the regular practice of forward bending poses.

Note: During the 1990s and 2000s the Yoga Research Foundation of the Bihar School of Yoga conducted significant research into the effects of yoga practices on diabetes.

REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM

What is the effect of inverted poses on the reproductive system?

Swami Satyananda: The sex glands and organs, which are liable to the accumulation of stagnant blood and easily lose their functional efficiency, especially as one becomes older, can be decongested and normalized by inverted poses.

It should be remembered that the sex glands, which both regulate the reproductive functions and the masculine or feminine body characteristics, are ultimately controlled by the pituitary gland in the brain. This gland is also encouraged to function optimally by inverted poses. The sexual functions therefore benefit in a threefold manner: through improved operation of the pituitary gland, the sex glands and the sexual organs themselves.

How can yoga help female infertility?

Swami Satyananda: Sometimes female infertility is due to a major structural abnormality present since birth. In such congenital deficiencies, little can be done with yoga, and rarely some surgical correction can be made. However, the most common cause of female infertility is amenorrhoea (failure to menstruate) due to disturbance or imbalance of the endocrine glands. More specifically, there is a problem in the hormonal axis between the pituitary body in the brain and the ovaries, which are responsible for producing the female sex hormones oestrogen and progesterone. Or, thyroid imbalance, which can be corrected by yoga asanas, can lead to amenorrhea. As a result of these hormonal imbalances the menstrual cycle is absent, either since puberty, or the last pregnancy, or since some period of psychic anxiety or emotional stress.

These forms of infertility respond well to a program of yoga asanas and bandhas designed specifically to activate and awaken dormant energy in the pelvic and reproductive organs. *Dhanurasana*, the bow posture, *sarvangasana*, the shoulder stand pose and *matsyasana*, the fish pose, which is the counterpose of *sarvangasana*, should be practised daily. These should be followed by *uddiyana bandha*, abdominal contraction.

These four asanas, practised regularly for a few months, should be sufficient to correct the condition completely. It is a matter of assessing the type of endocrine imbalance from the body type, weight and structure, and advising a suitable yoga program.

What are the physical benefits of moola bandha?

Swami Satyananda: At the physical level, moola bandha is directly effective in such diseases as: piles, constipation, anal fissures, ulcers, prostatitis, some cases of prostatic hypertrophy and chronic pelvic infections. Because it releases energy, it is also effective in other illnesses especially psychosomatic and some degenerative illnesses. Its effect spreads through the body via the brain and endocrine systems, making it beneficial in cases of diseases such as asthma, bronchitis and arthritis.

In the male body, moola bandha alleviates spermatorrhoea (leakage of semen), helps prevent inguinal hernia, and controls testosterone secretion and sperm formation; it pacifies passions, which influences coronary behaviour.

Research was done into the effect of moola bandha and vajroli kriya on the production of sperm. Subjects who were unable to produce sperm were taught these practices. It was found that through these practices the reproductive and genito-urinary systems can be influenced, and sperm production could be controlled.

Moola bandha is an important tool in the treatment of physical diseases of the lower abdomen e.g. digestive ailments and sexual disorders.

How does practising matsyasana benefit the reproductive system?

Swami Satyananda: When practising matsyasana the pelvic region is given a good stretch; this asana is therefore useful in preventing or removing various forms of sexual malfunctions in women. The pressure of the legs on the thighs greatly reduces the blood circulation in the legs, compressing the femoral arteries. This blood flow is diverted to the pelvic organs including the sexual glands (testes and prostate in males and ovaries in females), which helps to revitalize these organs and eliminate various types of associated ailments. Youthfulness and vitality are also closely related to the testes and ovaries – matsyasana helps to bring about these desirable attributes.

What are the therapeutic benefits of sirshasana for the reproductive system?

Swami Satyananda: *Sirshasana*, the headstand pose, has been found to be a great help in combating sexual disorders such as prostate problems, hydrocele, leucorrhea, spermatorrhea and all general menopausal and menstrual ailments. All the complex sexual functions are controlled by the pituitary gland.

Sirshasana helps to relieve sexual disorders in a number of ways:

- It improves the efficiency of the pituitary and the hypothalamus, the brain centre that in turn controls the pituitary gland.
- It drains blood from the associated sexual endocrinal glands (ovaries or testes) and the associated sexual organs; this also improves their functional efficiency.
- Sirshasana combined with relaxation or meditative techniques of yoga helps to calm the mind. Anxiety is the greatest factor in causing sexual disorders. Calmness of mind automatically leads to perfect health of the sexual functions.

Why is bhujangasana recommended for women?

Swami Sivananda: *Bhujangasana*, the cobra pose, is particularly useful for ladies in toning their ovaries and uterus. It is a powerful tonic. It relieves amenorrhoea (absence of menstruation), dysmenorrhoea (painful or difficult menstruation) and various other utero-ovarian diseases. Bhujangasana maintains efficient blood circulation to those parts. For ladies who practise bhujangasana, deliveries will be normal and easy.

7

Hatha Yoga for a Healthy Heart

RESEARCH

What research has been done on yoga for coronary disease?

Swami Satyananda: In 1966 I was asked by the Central Government of India to do a research program. I accepted that proposal and in Patna Medical College Hospital a committee of twenty-one doctors, with myself as coordinator, was formed. The subject was the effect of yoga on coronary diseases. The research was conducted on about 1,000 patients who were referred for a period of five years. It was conducted by the Head of the Department of Cardiology.

It is well known that coronary thrombosis is not a disease of the heart, it is a disease of success. It is a disease born of competition; a disease born of anxiety. This has been the conclusion of all who have done research on this subject. When one is disturbed, when one is filled with complexes and conflicts, and is suffering from anxiety, the physical body undergoes chemical change. The adrenalin secretions, the parathyroid, thyroid, sex hormones, pituitary, all the glands are influenced by the process of anxiety. The moment anxiety catches hold, the heart is disturbed. Why does this happen? It remains to be scientifically proven but one can surmise.

The moment the brain undergoes a process of disturbance, the body produces poisonous chemicals. Those

poisonous chemicals are introduced to the body by the bloodstream. Directly or indirectly they cause diabetes, nephritis, peptic ulcers, insomnia, coronary thrombosis and so on. Researchers found that the faulty secretions in the body were due to the excitement caused by emotional disturbances. To bring down the emotional disturbances, it was necessary to relax muscular tensions. The whole body is muscular, therefore the whole body is to be relaxed. The respiratory, excretory and circulatory systems all have to be relaxed, they are all muscles.

The muscular system has to be relaxed, but how to do it? First of all, drugs were tried; that drug was the famous drug of India, called ganja. After some time the researchers came to know that there is a possibility of diminishing the state of awareness by certain methods through optic exhaustion or through exhaustion of the auditory nerves. These are yogic practices.

Through the eyes and through the ears, a state of relaxation was brought about, but this relaxation was not complete. They saw that even in a deep state of relaxation, when the mind was not functioning the body was trembling. The cardiograph and other machines did not show positive results. Then a course of asanas and pranayama was given. It was found that if the practices of relaxation were preceded by asanas and pranayama, they were more powerful. So first comes the practice of asana, secondly pranayama, then the practice of relaxation. With this program, the individual was showing very optimistic and positive signs as far as the research observations were concerned.

The outcome of the experiment, in brief, was a drastic reduction in the amount of medication required by these patients, and the practices used were not complicated. They were just the simple practices of padmasana and siddhasana; simple pranayama, breathing in and out, no retention; simple backward bending asanas like cobra pose and locust pose, and forward bending poses like paschimottanasana and halasana. Many postures were

included. Most of the patients improved greatly when they were practising yoga, and their brainwaves were found to be very positive.

Many patients who came to the yoga class every morning and evening for twenty-five minute sessions found that the first thing that came into their mind was, "Now, I will be all right". This thought is as powerful, or even more powerful, than hundreds of tranquillizers and antibiotics. Once you get the idea into your head that you will be all right, you will be.

Later, these heart patients were given the practices of pranayama and finally they were taught bhastrika pranayama, rapid breathing with a high count, so that we could check the reaction of the heart.

I came to the conclusion that yoga is the right way, the only way, the most beautiful way to fight the problems of cardiac illness. How? With the help of asana, pranayama, and yoga nidra, the science of yogic relaxation. It is in this light, that the scope of yoga has been accepted.

What is the relationship between the mental state and heart health?

Swami Satyananda: Scientists have studied blood pressure and its relationship with the behaviour of the heart; both are related to the brainwaves. Anxiety and neurosis cause changes in the brainwaves.

To test the effect of calm concentration on the brainwaves and heart, a patient was asked to sit down quietly and concentrate on either a sound or a point. Simultaneously the brainwave pattern was measured, showing a change to alpha rhythm. With alpha brainwaves, the blood pressure drops immediately. Due to this, the walls of the coronary system are stretched. This shows that concentration of mind has a definite effect on blood pressure, brainwaves and coronary behaviour. The practices of concentration cannot be brushed aside by saying that it is mysticism or occultism.

How does pranayama benefit the heart?

Swami Niranjanananda: Many studies have verified that pranayama is extremely beneficial for the heart. The practices minimize the stress put on the cardiac system by day-to-day life. Breathing with slow, deep and long breaths gives rest to the heart. During the practices of pranayama, the muscles of the heart are gently massaged, allowing for good circulation. In bhastrika and kapalbhati, vibrations spread to the entire circulatory system, including the veins, arteries and capillaries, making them function more efficiently. Many heart conditions can be managed through pranayama.

BLOOD CIRCULATION

What practices stimulate poor circulation?

Swami Satyananda: Muscles act as pumps in the body. When a muscle contracts it squeezes the veins, pushing the blood towards the heart. Within the veins there are one-way valves, so the blood can only move towards the heart. This is why pawanmuktasana part one stimulates circulation throughout the body. Inverted poses are particularly useful for assisting circulation in the lower body, as the effect of gravity is reversed, helping move stagnant venous blood.

Another factor influencing circulation is the proportion of carbon dioxide and oxygen in the body. To optimize these levels, pranayama should be practised. When pranayama is practised the oxygen content increases and unnecessary carbon dioxide is expelled. Also, inhalation creates a negative pressure in the chest, which draws venous blood towards the heart. This means the heart pumps out more blood, increasing the rate of circulation.

What are the effects of inverted asanas on the circulatory system?

Swami Satyananda: During inverted poses, the return flow from the lower body is assisted by the force of gravity, resulting in a greater amount of blood returning to the

heart. Consequently, the increased venous return allows the heart to pump a greater arterial volume through the body. This greater quantity of blood flows through the lungs and produces an improved exchange of oxygen for carbon dioxide. More oxygen is then transferred to the body cells and carbon dioxide is more efficiently removed.

The increased circulation also ensures a more effective removal of all types of toxins and a more efficient supply of food nourishment throughout the body. Further, any stagnant or sluggish blood in the abdomen, legs and sexual organs is replaced by a good flow of purified blood, eliminating fatigue in these areas, particularly the legs.

During inversion of the body, the increased effective blood volume in circulation together with the assistance of gravity, supplies the upper parts of the body, including the brain, with an enriched blood flow at a slightly higher pressure than normal. This again ensures improved nourishment of the cells and a more efficient removal of toxins.

Inverted poses, if practised regularly and for a reasonable duration, improve the flushing action of the blood, actively assisting the breaking up of sclerotic deposits, which tend to build up on the linings of the blood vessels. These deposits are closely related to the occurrence of coronary thrombosis.

Since the time between heartbeats becomes considerably longer during the performance of inverted poses, the heart is rested. Though the blood pressure in the upper regions of the body increases during inverted poses, the pressure actually drops below normal after termination of the asana. This further rests the heart and also the arteries.

BLOOD PRESSURE

What causes hypertension and how can yoga help?

Swami Satyananda: All over the world there has been a sharp increase in the incidence of a fairly modern disease, hypertension. The hectic pace of life, type of food,

environmental pollution, and many other factors are causing hypertension. When this happens, the brain is not able to control the functions of the body. Coronary diseases, as well as many other diseases, occur on account of hypertension.

Hypertension is a state caused by the presence of various toxins, the result of responses to stress. Whenever an insufficient amount of oxygen is inhaled, or if the air one breathes is polluted, the body is stressed. When food is impure and unnatural, that also causes stress to the body. When one has to be alert and cautious all the time, there is further stress.

Tension in the brain affects blood pressure as the veins and arteries, the coronary system, and the whole process of blood pressure regulation is controlled from the brain. These tensions create more possibilities for excess cholesterol to enter the system and the hypertensive condition influences the endocrine secretions. These secretions are directly injected into the blood stream, and are capable of stimulating or depressing the whole system. When the tensions are too great, the endocrine glands inject hormones directly into the blood influencing the clotting mechanism and ultimately leading to heart attack.

Yoga has been instrumental in reducing hypertensive conditions. Hypertension can be greatly reduced and high blood pressure brought to a normal level by regular practice of yoga asanas and pranayamas. The efficiency of the heart action is increased and the heart-lung action is harmonized, helping oxygen to be used at an optimum level.

Which asanas help to regulate blood pressure?

Swami Satyananda: Whether one has high blood pressure or low blood pressure, the practice of siddhasana or siddha yoni asana, can successfully regulate the blood pressure. Shashankasana and sirshasana should also be practised, as well as bhastrika and kapalbhathi pranayama followed by a long relaxation.

What yogic practices help manage low blood pressure?

Swami Niranjanananda: Certain yoga asanas, pranayamas, bandhas and kriyas help to raise the blood pressure. Bhastrika pranayama, the technique of hyperventilation, is one. Asanas should be dynamic, like surya namaskara and trikonasana. Uddiyana bandha, jalandhara bandha and agnisar kriya also help raise blood pressure. However, these practices must be done under the supervision and guidance of a teacher, as it is possible that there may be some other underlying illness, disease or imbalance within the body which could give rise to a new problem.

What is the effect of sarvangasana on blood pressure and stress?

Swami Satyananda: In the neck there is a collection of receptors called carotid sinuses. These are sensitive to changes in blood pressure; when the pressure increases these receptors cause the heartbeat to slow down and the blood pressure to reduce.

During sarvangasana these sinuses are compressed by the position of the neck, keeping the heartbeat and blood pressure at a reasonable level throughout the asana. This is an advantage of sarvangasana over sirshasana, where the blood pressure rises during performance, though it does drop after termination.

Also, compression of the carotid sinuses induces tranquillity of the brain by means of sinus nerves which connect to the brain. In this way sarvangasana is particularly useful for removing anxiety and stress.

What are the effects of sirshasana on blood pressure and respiration?

Swami Satyananda: Various scientific tests have been made on people performing sirshasana. These indicate that the systolic pressure (blood pressure during the contraction phase of the heart), tends to become much higher than normal. After discontinuing sirshasana, the systolic pressure

becomes slightly subnormal, returning to its normal pressure after some time. Tests also indicate that after termination of sirshasana there is a notably rapid fall in blood pressure, which continues for a reasonably long time, depending on the individual.

The frequency of respiration, and hence the intake of air to the lungs, is considerably reduced, but the transfer of oxygen to the blood is appreciably increased. These results apply particularly if the practitioner of sirshasana is as relaxed as possible.

What is the effect of siddhasana on blood pressure?

Swami Satyananda: Siddhasana is not only important as a meditation pose. The pressure of the heels helps to control the outflow of testosterone, the male hormone produced in the testes. This hormone is important as it controls male function and also influences coronary behaviour. By controlling the outflow of testosterone, coronary accidents can be prevented. By suppressing the release of this important hormone, fluctuations of blood pressure can be controlled. Testosterone has an immediate constricting effect on the blood vessels, which in turn, burdens the whole coronary system by raising the pressure. During the practise of siddhasana, however, the outflow of testosterone is inhibited and the blood pressure is able to normalize.

What is the effect of bhramari on hypertension?

Swami Niranjanananda: It has been shown that bhramari is a very effective technique to lower hypertension.

Which pranayamas are beneficial for mental tension and high blood pressure?

Swami Satyananda: Prolonged practice of pranayama is not generally advisable during hot weather. Sheetalī, sheetkari and kaki mudra, however, can be done without fear.

Besides cooling the physical body, these three practices cool the mind and soothe mental tension. They are,

therefore, useful for alleviating psychosomatic diseases such as high blood pressure. The practices also purify the blood and improve digestion.

Note: During the 1990s and 2000s the Yoga Research Foundation of the Bihar School of Yoga conducted significant research into the effects of yoga practices on hypertension.

HEART DISEASE

What is the yogic approach to managing heart disorders?

Swami Satyananda: The yogic management of the diseased heart is slightly different from that devised by medical scientists, but both systems can be used for the patient's benefit. It is widely known that yoga experts in India appear publicly from time to time and stop their heart completely for some minutes, hours or even for many days. In earlier times, people either witnessed these events or simply believed in them, but in recent years such feats as burial followed by resurrection have been carried out in the presence of physiologists and cardiac physicians, using laboratory monitoring equipment. The results have been validated scientifically and widely publicized in medical journals and newspapers in India and other countries.

The clinical definition of death is stoppage of the heart for three minutes or more and a death certificate is issued on that basis. These experiments on yogis, however, have shown conclusively that the human heart can be voluntarily stopped and induced to function again after more prolonged time periods as a result of yogic training.

How is this relevant for cardiac patients? In the first place, it leads to the conclusion that the heart is not an independent organ failing of its own accord and that heart disease is an effect or result of an imbalance or loss of control occurring elsewhere. Where then does heart disease originate? Surely, it is in the brain, where

specific vasomotor centres control the rate, intensity and regularity of coronary impulses. Therefore, if someone is suffering from cardiac arrhythmia (uncontrolled, irregular heartbeat), angina (pain due to cardiac insufficiency) or a slow, failing heart, it should really be said that there is some malfunction in the coronary control centres of the brain, rather than something fundamentally and irreversibly wrong with the heart itself.

The most important factor leading to derangement in the coronary impulses emerging from the brain is a prolonged, excessive build up of anxiety and emotional conflict arising in domestic, marital or employment situations, coupled with a high level of subconscious intra-psychic stress arising from deeper unresolved and suppressed conflicts and memories from childhood and early life experiences. These cause fear and insecurity whenever they bubble up to the surface of the mind. When deep feelings of anger, competitiveness, jealousy, aggression, rejection and so on are not vented but are denied expression and suppressed within the mind, the cardiac impulse becomes unsteady. This occurs when the tension and strain is relayed to the heart as an excessive level of sympathetic nervous activity. As a result, the heart strains and labours excessively, with heart strain and failure as the end result.

One's mental and emotional metabolism is directly reflected in the performance of one's heart, and this is why yoga approaches the problem at its roots, whereas medical science, focusing more on the heart itself, relies on long-term drug therapy to bolster the failing heart mechanism, with little reference to the underlying causes on the mental and emotional planes.

If a yogi can stop and restart the heart through specific psychophysiological training, surely a cardiac sufferer can learn to recognize and gain control over the anxiety-generating mental patterns which are constantly throwing the heart mechanisms into revolt and disarray. It has been shown that lasting cardiac relief cannot be gained while

the load of environmental and intra-psyche stress remain suppressed and unresolved.

Approaching heart disease in this way, a yogic treatment program is followed which has proved tremendously effective for cardiac patients. A new awareness of a patient's situation soon emerges; he begins to recognize and understand his problem more objectively in the light of this relaxation, as confidence in his ability to relax his mind is gained. By going beyond the confines of his mental anguish into a refreshing realm of relaxation, a new, more joyful person begins to spontaneously emerge, confident of his abilities to live. He no longer feels confined in an impossible predicament in which he is estranged from his own failing heart, but sees that the root cause is his own thinking, and that he possesses the power to heal his heart and mind through yoga.

What is the best yoga posture for preventing and managing heart disease?

Swami Satyananda: Medical scientists have found an important connection between the reproductive metabolism and the heart. Excessive and uncontrolled levels of the male hormone testosterone in the blood are correlated with a preponderance of such traits as over-assertiveness, acquisitiveness and latent or overt aggression which characterize the cardiac personality, the type most prone to a sudden heart attack. Research has revealed the existence of specific receptor sites for this hormone in the myocardial tissue of the heart, and also in the walls of the larger blood vessels, and it is now felt that myocardial damage is induced by testosterone accumulation at these sites.

Heart attack is far more frequent in men than in women up to the age of the menopause, but beyond that, the incidence in both sexes is similar. This strongly suggests that the female hormonal environment bestows a natural protection for the female heart, whereas the male heart is endangered by excessive levels of male hormones. In order to combat this, the masculine emotional and sexual

metabolism needs to be controlled. For this purpose the practice of meditation in siddhasana is recommended, as in this asana the lower heel exerts pressure in the area of the prostate gland in the region of the perineal floor, and the upper heel is against the pubic bone, above the root of the generative organ.

This posture stabilizes the two lower psychic centres – mooladhara chakra and swadhisthana chakra, redirecting prana up towards the higher centres. Blockage of energy at these two centres is responsible for many health problems, and also poses a barrier which has to be crossed in spiritual life. Mooladhara is the root centre in which an infinite source of pranic energy lies dormant and asleep, while swadhisthana is the centre responsible for the sexual and emotional metabolism in which psychic energy most spontaneously manifests. When one's emotional life does not extend beyond this plane, blood pressure and cardiac function remain unstable and one's role and purpose in life remain ill-defined and unclear. There is an 'ache' in the heart which never knows the experience of constancy, beyond fickle and transitory emotional feelings. The higher experiences of the human heart and mind remain impenetrable unless the energy can be stabilized and led up into the higher centres of consciousness. In this sense, heart disease can be considered an evolutionary malady, where one suffers due to bondage on the emotional plane, while one's being aches to experience the constancy which arises when emotional attachments and aversions have been transcended.

It has been found that siddhasana proves most beneficial when learned during the late teens or early twenties when the emotional and sexual drives and passions are likely



Siddhasana

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to be unruly. At that time, siddhasana is found to rectify problems such as excessive nocturnal emission. If used throughout life, it bestows protection from emotional ravages and stabilizes the passions, preventing later cardiac demise.

The heart is protected when there is neither suppression of, nor anarchical expression of emotional complexes. The key to preservation of the heart lies in controlled expression of desires, instincts and drives and this is learned by following the precepts and practices of yoga throughout the different stages of life. By incorporating some asanas, pranayama and meditation into the daily program from an early age, the penalty of an overtaxed heart is avoided in middle age, and the emotions are channelled and expressed in a more creative way throughout life.

When siddhasana is practised, what is happening? One is pressing the perineum between the excretory and the urinary organs with the left heel. With the right heel, one is pressing the lower abdominal viscera at the root of the urinary organ, or above the clitoris. These two points, which are important in controlling the flow of blood through the arteries and veins, are being pressed.

The posture of siddhasana also helps in the treatment of abnormal blood pressure. Any time one is suffering from high blood pressure or low blood pressure, if he just sits in this posture for half an hour or if possible one hour, the blood pressure will move towards normal. This is because the pressure exerted on the perineum and the viscera is transmitted to the brain centres which control the blood pressure. High blood pressure is caused by tension and stress reacting through the brain to the blood vessels and heart. There are, of course, other ways of controlling high blood pressure, but this is in relation to siddhasana and its importance in this era.

The central role of cholesterol should be understood. This fatty substance is the precursor from which the sex hormones are synthesized by the gonads and the adrenal glands. It is also required in the production of the

spermatozoa by the testes, along with other fatty protein complexes known as lipoproteins. These are needed to provide the structural requirements of the sperm, and to provide the machinery which gives every sperm such an enormous energetic and motile capacity.

If the emotional and reproductive metabolism is unruly and uncontrolled then the turnover of new sperm must occur at a rapid rate and an enormous amount of energy must be constantly provided to synthesize these replacement sperm. As a result a high level of cholesterol and protein is necessary, and this usually comes from dietary sources. This necessitates a high protein and fat diet, and demands that the physiological systems of digestion and cell synthesis operate at a high rate, pushing up the metabolic rate and basal temperature in the process. Strain on the heart, the digestive organs such as the liver, and the eliminatory organs such as kidneys, bowels and sweat glands, is inevitable. Excessive wear and tear on the physiological systems is the end result and cardiac strain is one major effect.

Clearly, the emotional metabolism must be stabilized if the body is to be preserved. This can be attained by the twin approach of dietary regulation, where a decreased protein and fat intake is recommended, coupled with the growth of self-knowledge, self-expression and self-control, which are developed by following the royal path of yoga amidst all the various worldly confrontations and difficulties. These measures are the best insulators against heart disease in the community as a whole.

In this regard, it is not enough to simply follow the precepts of a traditional religion. While this may provide a degree of mental and emotional security, it is actually suppressive and anti-evolutionary, for it does not allow one to come to terms with the emotional and instinctual factors of one's nature directly. Traditional religions offer only precepts and concepts, but yoga offers psychophysiological practices which channel emotional energy correctly. The key to an enlightened emotional and sexual life, free of mental conflicts

and physiological exhaustion, lies in the practice of yoga techniques in conjunction with normal daily life experiences.

Yoga does not require renunciation, but leads its practitioner to a fuller enjoyment of every aspect of life. The experiences of life should be enjoyed and understood if one is to progress and evolve. Blind adherence to dogma only blocks this evolutionary process, leading to mental illness and physical disease, but yoga offers the sublime way to fully appreciate life and complete our evolutionary journey.

What asanas can be practised by those with heart conditions?

Swami Satyananda: Asanas have an important part to play in restoration of cardiac function. They are very valuable, but of course one has to use commonsense and have some experience. For example, even the patient who has just endured a myocardial infarction will gain relief if his legs are slightly elevated on a pillow so as to enhance venous drainage to the failing heart.

In subsequent recovery, the pawanmuktasana part one series is a simple way of promoting circulation of blood and lymphatic fluid to the heart. In the beginning it will be no more than the movement of toes and ankles, but if practised with relaxed awareness, such simple exercises provide relief for the mind and comfort for the spirit, it is not just a matter of their physical effects. Of course, there should be no strain. After all, asanas are for enjoyment, and a few of them should be practised daily by everybody according to their needs and capacities. Cardiac patients are not exceptions, and they should not be excluded from these practices.

It must be remembered that heart disease is a general term including many degrees of incapacity. The discussion has been about the acute infarction situation, but yoga has a lot to offer those with long-term cardiac disabilities such as angina, drug-controlled heart failure, arrhythmia and scarred myocardial muscle from prior infarct. Every case is slightly different, but they have in common a constant and fearful awareness that

the heart is vulnerable, and usually so many precautions and restrictions have been recommended. Some doctors insist that asanas and regular exercise be avoided by this group, but this only serves to sustain cardiac neurosis.

How does practising sirshasana benefit the heart?

Swami Satyananda: *Sirshasana*, the headstand pose, is well known for increasing oxygenation of the body tissues. What is not so widely known is the beneficial influence of *sirshasana* on the behaviour of the heart. During *sirshasana* the rate of oxygen consumption decreases while the rate of oxygen assimilation increases. This was verified by a team of Polish researchers. *Sirshasana* is important in heart disease because when the consumption of oxygen is reduced, the heart rate is also reduced. If coronary problems are to be controlled, people must be trained to use the minimum amount of oxygen. The practices of *sirshasana* and *kumbhaka* are the most important practices for reducing oxygen consumption and training the involuntary muscles of the heart and brain.

Which breathing practices help people with heart disease?

Swami Satyananda: Conventional pranayama is not used for cardiac patients, but the breath is definitely used as a vehicle of relaxation. The patient learns to make friends with the spontaneous inflowing and outflowing breath without attempting to control it in any way; rather, it is effortlessly witnessed, with observation of the spontaneous rise and fall of the navel. There must be no strain, only awareness.

This automatically alters the filling patterns of the lobes of the lungs and the chambers of the heart; respiration automatically becomes deeper and more efficient. The heart rate slows and the cardio-respiratory efficiency increases. This is a vital step for many anxious cardiac patients. Often they are fast, shallow breathers, unconsciously confining the breath to the chest cavity, in parallel with their cardiac anxiety. This practice effectively unties the physiological,

psychological and psychic knot in the heart region, where it has been confined for many anxious years: great relief is experienced.

What is the yogic treatment for angina?

Swami Satyananda: With angina, an immediate improvement has been observed if the patient is completely removed from the family circumstances and situations. Family problems and business problems hurt the patient a great deal. They are far more important in causing angina than is physical effort. Emotional factors are more significant but they are underrated in medical circles, while the restrictions on effort and exercise are excessive. Therefore, in yoga therapy, the first change is in the environment. A few weeks in a yoga ashram provides the ideal setting for recovery and rehabilitation of such cardiac conditions.

Here, the patient is instructed first in pawanmuktasana, a series of light exercises involving every part of the body. Both the anti-rheumatic and anti-gastric series are taught, perfecting them carefully and in a relaxed, enjoyable manner which allows yogic self-awareness to develop spontaneously. Only a few of the more dynamic exercises are excluded from the program, and relaxation in shavasana is incorporated as a matter of course, so that the state of physical and mental relaxation can soon be effortlessly attained when the patient is alone. This is an important step in cardiac disorders, because the cardiac personality is often the tense, ambitious and aggressive one to whom relaxation in its deeper sense is an unknown experience.

Next, asanas are taught, beginning with the vajrasana series, and few limitations or restrictions are imposed. Matsyasana, bhujangasana, dhanurasana and so on are performed, but sarvangasana and paschimottanasana are usually avoided at the outset. The teaching must be correct. The postures are for relaxation and enjoyment, not to stress and strain the system, nor to compete or compare. Nadi shodhana pranayama is practised with the breath just slightly

deeper than normal. Mild bhastrika and kapalbhati are not contra-indicated, but they must be learned subtly and correctly. This is most important. Kumbhaka and bandhas are avoided.

What role do the cleansing practices of hatha yoga play in cardiac management?

Swami Satyananda: Jala neti is a simple and refreshing practice which releases blocked energy from the autonomic nervous centres in the region of the hypothalamus and the eyebrow centre (ajna chakra) where psychic tension accumulates. Therefore, it is recommended daily for cardiac patients. In general, kunjla and shankhaprakshalana are avoided in the beginning, not because they are not beneficial, but because they require a large volume of saline water being taken into the body, and this can compromise the fluid and electrolyte balance of such patients. Certainly a patient with some degree of long-standing circulatory failure, who is taking diuretic medications to help the kidneys eliminate excessive body fluid, is recommended to avoid these kriyas.

Sometimes chronic constipation and overtaxing of the digestive organs has been a major predisposing factor in the genesis of the patient's present cardiac condition. It may then be necessary to practise laghoo shankhaprakshalana (the short form of intestinal cleansing). In this situation warm water is used with very little salt added and the patient is closely supervised to avoid adverse reactions.

How common is heart disease in India?

Swami Satyananda: In India, heart disease is not a major disease, whereas in the West it is a major killer. In India, only the people following the modern way of life, sitting in a room all day and not going out, suffering from anxiety, insecurity, stress and strain, etc., have heart attacks. In the villages, people do not understand what a heart attack is. They are simple folk. They go to sleep on time, wake up on time and take proper food and exercise, just as the body requires.

8

Hatha Yoga for Other Physical Conditions

EAR AND EYE AILMENTS

Why is jala neti helpful for ear ailments?

Swami Satyananda: Many ear ailments are caused by blockage of the eustachian tubes. The ear is divided into three chambers: the outer, middle and inner sections. Sound vibrations are transmitted from the environment through the outer ear and into the middle ear via the eardrum, which also separates the outer ear from the middle ear. There is no direct connection between the two chambers. For perfect hearing the pressure of air in the middle ear must be the same as that outside the body – atmospheric. This is brought about by means of the two eustachian tubes, which connect each ear to the back of the throat.

These tubes are about the same diameter as a pencil lead and easily become blocked by mucus deposits. The best way to remove this type of problem is by practising jala neti, as this helps draw blockages out from these tubes.

How does neti benefit the eyes?

Swami Niranjanananda: Jala neti is the best practice for cleansing the eyes and sustaining vision. Jala neti influences the organs and muscles connected with vision. Blood flow in the capillaries supplying the eyes is increased and as a result the eyes receive more blood. This helps remove metabolic

waste, such as carbon dioxide, from the eye area. It has been found that disorders of the eyes are often rectified solely with this practice, particularly if the defects are in their initial stages. Additionally, different people have individual experiences. Some may find their headaches go away; others will note their speech develops clarity.

Does trataka improve eyesight?

Swami Sivananda: Trataka improves eyesight. Diseases of the eyes are removed. Many have thrown away their spectacles after some practice in trataka. It develops the power of concentration to a great degree. Trataka practice gives tremendous power; removes a host of eye troubles, and bestows *divya drishti*, divine vision.

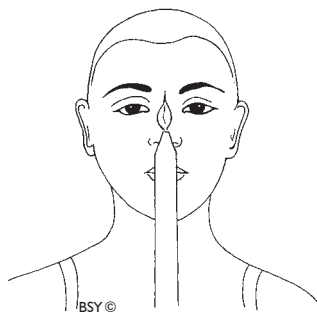
What are the physiological benefits of trataka?

Swami Niranjanananda: Physiologically trataka relieves eye ailments such as eyestrain and headache, myopia, astigmatism and even early stages of cataract. It can help to remove nervous tics or uncontrolled nervous activity such as one eye blinking very fast. The eyes become clear and bright, able to see the reality beyond appearances. Trataka benefits not only the eyes, but a whole range of physiological and mental functions. It is therapeutic for depression, insomnia, allergy, anxiety and postural problems. In *Hatharatnavali* (1: 53) the benefits are given:

*Sphotanam netrarogaanaam
tantraadeenaam kavaatakam.*

*Prayatnaattrotanam gopyam
yathaaatnam supetakam.*

Trataka, which clears eye diseases and prevents sloth, should be valued and kept secret with the same effort as one keeps a casket of precious stones.



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Trataka

Is the practice of trataka good for eye disorders?

Swami Satyananda: A little practice of trataka is of great use in removing eye disorders. Those who have weak eyesight and use spectacles should practise trataka for five minutes daily on a dot made on the wall and wash their eyes with triphala, an Ayurvedic herb, every morning and evening. After practising this for fifteen days or a month, the eyes should be examined by a doctor.

What is the effect of inverted poses on the ears and eyes?

Swami Satyananda: The effective functioning of the eyes depends on a particularly good supply of oxygen. Thus the inverted poses, by increasing the blood flow to the eyes, also supply them with a supplementary quantity of oxygen. A further improvement in the power of vision is brought about by the increased blood supply to the cerebral centre that controls the operation of the eyes and interprets the information that they receive.

The ears also benefit from inverted poses by the enriched blood circulation.

How does sirshasana improve the functioning of the sensory organs?

Swami Satyananda: Sirshasana helps to improve the operation of the sensory organs. That is, it can help to improve eyesight, hearing and the senses of smell and taste. The eyes require a large supply of oxygen in order to work perfectly. The extra supply of blood during sirshasana helps to bring this about.

Besides making the sensory organs healthier, sirshasana directly influences the brain centres that interpret and control the sense organs. Various ailments such as myopia, astigmatism, catarrh and general bad hearing can improve with regular practise of sirshasana.

SKIN

Why is sirshasana good for the skin?

Swami Satyananda: The condition of facial skin can be improved through regular practise of sirshasana. Pimples and wrinkles are often caused by inadequate removal of waste materials and insufficient nourishment from the blood. Sirshasana directs an oxygen-rich flow of blood to the face thereby improving the complexion.

HEADACHE

How does yoga treat headache?

Swami Satyananda: Headache is not a particular disease but a symptom. It could be a symptom of migraine or it can be due to high or low blood pressure, or to a defect of the eyes. Generally speaking, the practice of neti is helpful.

What yogic practices relieve migraine?

Swami Satyananda: First thing in the morning, the moment one gets out of bed and before making too much physical movement, two or three glasses of tepid water should be drunk and then regurgitated. Do this for a few weeks, if not daily, every third day. That is the first thing. Next, practise jala neti followed by bhastrika pranayama. And finally, to be rid of migraine, take three or four days off and have a nice time at an ashram where *shankhaprakshalana*, total cleansing of the digestive system, from top to bottom, from one end to the other, can be practised.

VARICOSE VEINS

What yoga practices help varicose veins?

Swami Satyananda: Inverted asanas are the best practices for varicose veins if they are practised for a longish duration. *Sirshasana*, headstand pose, and *sarvangasana*, shoulder stand pose, cannot be done for so long, but *vipareeta karani*

asana, the inverted pose, is easier and can be held for five to seven minutes. The pose has to be held for more than five minutes; if this can't be done, then lie down and raise the level of the legs, placing a support underneath, and remain in that posture for over ten minutes. Pawanmuktasana and surya namaskara are also helpful, but these asanas need to be done for an extended period to get positive results.

Why is sirshasana good for varicose veins?

Swami Satyananda: While the upper part of the body receives an extra supply of blood, the lower parts are drained of blood. This has beneficial repercussions, since there is a tendency for blood to stagnate in the legs, in the pelvic and abdominal organs. This drainage removes impure stagnant blood so that it can be replaced with pure, oxygenated blood after terminating sirshasana.

Two very common ailments are varicose veins and piles, caused by accumulation of blood in the legs and anus respectively. This places great pressure on the blood vessels and in time causes them injury. Regular practise of sirshasana relieves pressure on the vessels for a short time and is a great help in alleviating either of these ailments.

KIDNEYS

How can yoga help kidney stones?

Swami Satyananda: If the stones are in the form of sediments they can easily be erased; simple shankhaprakshalana can manage them. But if the stones are hard, homeopathic drugs will have to be used to break them. In India, there is a particular grain which is boiled and the boiled water of that grain is drunk every morning and that breaks all the stones.

Anyone who has stones in the kidney should not take spinach or tomato. They are rich sources of organic acid: tomato and spinach are the worst enemies of the kidneys. One should drink plenty of water. If one has stones in the kidney, flushing has to be done regularly.

What is the effect of forward bending asanas on the kidneys?

Swami Satyananda: The kidneys are influenced by these asanas. With the practice of forward bending asanas, the kidneys, which are associated with the purification of the blood and the excretion of urine, are encouraged to function efficiently.

PARKINSON'S DISEASE

How can yoga help Parkinson's disease?

Swami Satyananda: Speaking from a physiological viewpoint, Parkinson's disease is due to a deficiency of one of the brain transmitter hormones, dopamine, in the centres of the brain which are responsible for muscular coordination and fine movements. It is a degenerative disease which afflicts some people later in life. In medical science, the doctors administer the synthetic analogue of dopamine, known as L-dopa, in an effort to bolster the brain's diminishing level of dopamine, and this controls the symptoms of the disorder to a varying degree.

However, in yoga the approach is somewhat different. Yoga aims to reactivate the degenerating areas of the brain by systematically stabilizing the nervous system using pranayama. The process of anarchical degeneration of the brain centres has to be arrested and finally reversed. It is the same approach that is adopted for multiple sclerosis, where the protective, nourishing sheath of myelin surrounding some of the nervous conducting fibres and pathways in the brain begins to degenerate in a haphazard way. Those nerves are starved of nourishment, their prana shakti dwindles and they cease to function. Nevertheless the process is reversible. The difference is that multiple sclerosis occurs in a younger person, so reversal is easier to achieve because motivation, commitment, self-effort and the will to change are attributes which are harder to awaken and sustain in an older person.

The best practice for people with Parkinson's disease is nadi shodhana pranayama, alternate nostril breathing. In this method there are two stages of retention – first with the breath held in, and then with the breath held out. When holding the breath in, practise jalandhara bandha, the throat lock, and moola bandha in which the perineum is contracted. These two locks are held while retaining the breath in. After breathing out, hold the breath outside and practise uddiyana bandha, contraction of the abdomen, along with jalandhara and moola bandhas. With internal retention there are two contractions, and in external retention there are three contractions.

When inhaling and exhaling, the ratio should be 1:2. In the beginning this ratio may prove impossible, but ultimately one should aim towards it. Don't practise 1:3 or 1:4, but 1:2. This is the fundamental physiological breath ratio for healing purposes where there is an energy deficit to be restored. At first the breath may be shaky and gross. It may be too quick or too slow. By daily practise the flow of breath should be trained or cultivated until gradually the volume, intensity and quality of the breath passing in and out should be the same.

This is the detailed practice for a person suffering from Parkinson's disease. It should be performed daily, gradually increasing the number of rounds. The benefits will begin to show after a short time. There are other practices, but this is sufficient in the beginning. It can be used in conjunction with other medical management.

If the person is not able to absorb this type of instruction, then start from a more preliminary process. Just sit still, breathe in and out, in and out. In this way, breathing with awareness is learned. Once this is accomplished, basic nadi shodhana without ratios or retention can be practised: just use the natural breath. Go step by step, making sure there is understanding.

CANCER

How can cancer be treated by yoga therapy?

Swami Satyananda: Cancer can be successfully treated by yoga therapy. Here is an example. A patient, the son-in-law of a multimillionaire, who was himself an eminent medical doctor in India, was brought to the ashram. He had been in London and had to be brought back to India because of cancer in the spine.

He came to the ashram and only one practice was recommended to him: revitalizing breathing. He had to do nothing except *khechari mudra* – folding back the tongue and touching the upper palate with it, then practise a particular pranayama called *ujjayi*, in which the breath sounds like steam escaping from an engine. This is known as psychic breathing. With his eyes open or closed, he was instructed to breathe this way fifty, a hundred or a hundred and fifty times.

First of all he was highly sceptical. He asked, “Will it cure me?” He was told, “If there is any other system available which you think can cure you, then take that course.” He was himself a doctor and had given up all hope of survival. He was told, “Practise it with inspiration and enthusiasm.” He practised for one full year or more, and he is still very much alive today. He no longer has cancer, but unfortunately he is not able to move his head, either to the right or to the left, because of a certain test he had undergone before coming to the ashram. He was advised by the ashram, “Don’t worry, if you persist in practising these other yoga postures, in the course of a year or two, your neck will be able to move again.” He hasn’t been seen since, but maybe even if he cannot move his head easily, he can at least look a little from side to side.

He is still the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine in a well known university. He tells all his medical students that yoga is important, not only as a philosophy or a spiritual science, but due to certain physical changes that definitely occur during the practice of yoga.

9

Hatha Yoga for Mental Health

GENERAL MENTAL HEALTH

How can yoga help people improve their mental health?

Swami Satyananda: There are different branches of yoga. All these can help in one's individual and social life. Yoga is mental therapy. Asana, pranayama, ajapa japa, nada yoga and all other practices of yoga help remove the accumulated *samskaras*, impressions, from the mind. Once these *samskaras* go, one's neuroses, mental conflicts, complexes and frustrations also depart.

If one wants to change the personality, if one wants to remove complexes, yoga is the answer.

How can hatha yoga cure psychological problems?

Swami Satyananda: Scientists have investigated the *asanas*, physical postures, and the *pranayamas*, breathing exercises, of hatha yoga, and discovered that they not only influence the physical condition but also the psychosomatic, mental and vital conditions, which appear as psychological diseases.

Mental conditions such as restlessness, anxiety, neurosis, sleeplessness, worries and other psychosomatic disorders, though they are psychological, can be safely cured through the practice of asanas. The asanas influence the endocrinal glands such as the adrenal and thyroid glands, and by this

mechanism not only remove physical defects, but also correct the imbalanced condition of the human mind.

Is yoga a suitable treatment for mental and emotional disturbances?

Swami Satyananda: Mental sickness can never be cured by leading a life of only material prosperity. Just saying a few prayers in the morning does not cure mental sickness either.

Mental sickness is a terrible thing which must be understood. A few sensible individuals become aware of it in themselves, but many people live in ignorance, functioning from a deep basis of anxiety, worries and fears but without recognizing it. People may say that yoga is not for them, but no one in the world is free from sickness. There is no one whose mind is not ill. The body is always being studied by scientists, trying to understand headaches, fevers, colds and coughs – but what about the diseases of the inner personality, which stem from the psychic desires that are unknown, but are reflected in day-to-day behaviour? This type of mental sickness is spreading throughout the world like an epidemic and it needs to be treated immediately.

Individual minds are part of the collective mind. Individual mental sickness and collective mental sickness can lead to disaster. When the body is ill, one is aware of it and takes care of it. When the mind is ill, one does not know it and therefore does not take care of it. The inner layers of one's mind, one's psyche, one's being, is beyond conception – people live only in the world of matter.

Yoga is a method by which a healthy atmosphere can be brought about in one's system. Many people do not think about mental illness, but their thoughts, their behaviour, and the way they infect society with their system of thinking and philosophy reflect the patterns of a disturbed mind.

The subconscious mind and the deeper layers of the subconscious ultimately become responsible for the expression of life. Therefore, it becomes necessary for every individual to be treated, and the treatment of mind or the

treatment of the inner personality can take place with the practice of yoga. This includes treating emotional disorders that are born out of emotional maladjustment.

What is the yogic approach to removing tension?

Swami Satyananda: Tensions are physical, mental and emotional. Unbalanced hormonal secretions due to faulty living, faulty breathing and so on can cause tensions. They are not necessarily due to the psychological problems of society or the emotional maladjustment of the family. There can also be nervous disorders and other physiological problems.

This is why asanas and pranayamas come first in yoga, to remove muscular and physical tensions, eliminate toxins from the body and at the same time, balance the hormonal secretions. For instance, over and under secretion of the pituitary hormones, the sexual hormones, adrenalin and thyroxin has a great influence on behaviour and thinking. The effect of hatha yoga on the mind is mentioned in *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (1:67) when it says that hatha yoga leads to success in raja yoga:

*Peethaani kumbhakaashchitraa divyaani karanaani cha;
Sarvaanyapi hathaabhyaase raajayogaphalaavadhih.*

Asanas, various types of kumbhaka, and the other various means of illumination should all be practised in the hatha yoga system until success in raja yoga is attained.

How does the hatha yoga practice of trataka purge the unconscious mind?

Swami Satyananda: An accumulation of archetypes collectively form the karma of an individual. It is on account of them that one's mind, emotions and personality are formed. If one suffers in life, it is on account of deep-rooted karma, or if one enjoys life, it is also on account of karma. How does one deal with one's karma?

Karma cannot be dealt with by a rational process such as psychoanalysis or psychiatric treatment; it has to be

understood as a subtle force underlying each and every action or event that is encountered. It has been found that the practice of concentration on a symbol is effective in purging these archetypes from the unconscious mind. In yoga this practice of concentration is known as *trataka*, and it should be done prior to the practice of yoga nidra.

When practising *trataka* on a symbol, these particles or *samskaras* in the brain are stimulated. There are hundreds of symbols prescribed in yoga and tantra, out of which some are considered more powerful than others. For example, concentration on a yantra or mandala is extremely powerful, depending on the quality of the yantra or mandala one chooses. *Trataka* done on the kali yantra or mandala brings out repressions more quickly, often in the form of nightmarish experiences. Concentration on different yantras and mandalas bring out different quantities and qualities of repressed material. These repressions can be experienced in dreams, or in the state of meditation, and that means the whole thing is being flushed out. Therefore, side by side with yoga nidra, concentration should be taught, according to the quality and resistance of the aspirant.

What tranquillizing pranayamas promote mental health?

Swami Satyananda: Pranayama is a panacea. It should be taught to children from the age of eight. For mental sickness, practise pranayama – *ujjayi*, the psychic breath. For insomnia, practise pranayama – *sheetali* and *sheetkari*, the cooling breaths. For high blood pressure and cardiovascular complications, practise *bhramari*, the humming bee breath, *sheetali*, *sheetkari* and *ujjayi*. The effect of *bhramari* on the mind is described in *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (2:68):

*Vegaadghosham poorakam bhringanaadam bhringeenaadam
rechakam mandamandam;
Yogeendraanaamevamabhyasayogaachchitte jaataa
kaachidaanandaleelaa.*

Breathe in quickly, making a reverberating sound like the male black bee, and exhale slowly while softly making the sound of the female black bee. By this yogic practice one becomes lord of the yogis and the mind is absorbed in bliss.

Hatha yoga cleanses the body, but can the mind also be cleansed?

Swami Satyananda: There is a technique in hatha yoga called *shankhaprakshalana* which eliminates toxins from the stomach and cleans the whole alimentary canal. The stomach is completely cleaned and the body becomes light and free from tension.

Likewise, there is a mental *shankhaprakshalana* which frees the mind from unnecessary thoughts and provides mental equilibrium. Our minds are constipated with foul conceptions, tensions, old *samskaras* and many unfulfilled desires. As long as there are unnecessary worries and inhibitions the mind cannot relax.

When one cleans the physical body, salt water is drunk and then one goes to the toilet a number of times. This creates tiredness but afterwards one feels much better. In the same way, mental *shankhaprakshalana* is tiring in the beginning due to the tremendous amount of thoughts, but ultimately, when one is able to evacuate the mind of thoughts, real happiness can be enjoyed.

STRESS MANAGEMENT

How can stress be managed by lifestyle?

Swami Sivananda: If there is mental fatigue in students due to too much strain and study, if there is mental fatigue in merchants on account of business worries, if there is fatigue in officers on account of overwork, they should take proper rest at once. They should go to the hills or the seaside for a change. They should do *pranayama* and take a light, wholesome, nutritious diet. They should do *japa* and *kirtan* vigorously and practise easy *asanas*.

Why does hatha yoga recommend a regulated and moderate lifestyle?

Swami Sivananda: Physical health is an important condition of mental health. Strain of any organ, excessive fatigue and mental strain should be avoided. One's life must be well regulated and disciplined. *Samyama*, restraint, must be practised in all things. Excess of any kind should be avoided. Stick to the happy, golden medium. Rest is necessary. Yogi Swatmarama advises such restraint in *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (1:15):

*Atyaahaarah prayaasshva prajalpo niyamagrahah;
Janasangashcha laulyam cha shadbhiryogo vinashyati.*

Overeating, exertion, talkativeness, adhering to rules, being in the company of common people and unsteadiness (wavering mind) are the six (causes) which destroy yoga.

What is the importance of asanas and pranayamas for releasing mental tension?

Swami Satyananda: People think that asanas and pranayamas are just exercises, but they are not exercises, they should not be practised as exercises, and they should be practised with great care.

Scientific investigations carried out in different parts of the world, such as Russia, Poland, India, France and Germany, have proved that during the practice of asanas the whole endocrinal system is greatly influenced; as a result, toxins are eliminated and energy blocks are cleared.

The practice of asanas and pranayamas first removes muscular tensions, then mental tensions. Mental tensions are the greatest tensions and they must be dealt with – overthinking, wrong thinking and vicious thinking, all of which occur in daily life, cause mental tensions.

How can one learn to deal with any kind of stress that occurs in life?

Swami Niranjanananda: If the practices of asana, pranayama, relaxation, yoga nidra and the two practices of concentration, *trataka* and *ajapa japa*, are incorporated into one's routine, the ability to manage each and every kind of stress in the world is possible. The ability to maintain health in the most adverse conditions can be developed. The strength to experience one's inner power in the most demanding situations the world can throw at you will arise. That is the application of yoga in one's life.

How do asana and pranayama bring about a healthy body and mind?

Swami Niranjanananda: Generally, one of the two energies, physical or mental, is unbalanced in everyone. A person may say that they are healthy, but at some point in life everyone has to face anxiety and stress, frustration and tension, and physiological as well as psychological illness. When asana and pranayama are practised, the first job is to eliminate the blockages from the nadis, thereby ensuring that the body and mind attain a state of optimum health.

How can yoga help calm a restless mind?

Swami Satyananda: Generally, restlessness is due to excessive thinking and desiring, and it indicates that the mind is not under control. In this physical body there are two forms of energy. One is known as mental energy and the other is vital or pranic energy. When one feels restless, it means the mental energy is high and the pranic energy is low; there is an imbalance, the sense organs are very active and the motor organs are less active. In hatha yoga language, we call this an imbalance between *ida* and *pingala nadis*, or in modern scientific terms, an imbalance between the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems.

There are two ways to approach the problem. Either limit the amount of mental energy or increase the amount

of pranic energy. The purpose of hatha yoga, raja yoga, or in fact, any form of yoga, is to create this harmonious situation. In order to reduce excess mental energy, mantra repetition is the best practice. Alternatively, hatha yoga says, try to increase the level of prana in the body.

Additionally, there are certain hormonal secretions which contribute to restlessness. The most disturbing hormones are adrenalin and testosterone. If the outflow of these hormones can be controlled, the physiological causes leading to restlessness can be overcome. By regularly practising asana, pranayama and meditation, hormonal production is controlled, mental and pranic energies are harmonized, and problems such as restlessness do not occur.

What yoga practices are recommended for a restless mind?

Swami Niranjanananda: For immediate relief from the restless mind, the pranayama practices are extremely beneficial. It is not necessary to sit down in the market place and start closing the nose to perform nadi shodhana whenever one feels disturbed. Practise psychic pranayama instead. Mentally imagine, “I am breathing in through the left nostril, I am breathing out through the right nostril,” etc. The eyes do not even need to be closed. In order to do bhramari, do not plug the ears, just start humming as if humming a tune – *hmmmm*.

This will immediately help to break the state of restlessness and anxiety. If the condition persists, then of course, on returning home, do other practices like yoga nidra, antar mouna and mantra meditation to become centred.

Which pranayama practices are the most important for stress management?

Swami Niranjanananda: The tranquillizing pranayama practices are designed to relax the body and mind, while simultaneously increasing the pranic capacity and conscious awareness. These pranayamas stimulate the parasympathetic

nervous system and draw the awareness within. Some bring about greater psychic sensitivity, while others cool the system. These practices should be avoided by persons who are excessively introverted, oversensitive or psychically unbalanced, as they may exacerbate these conditions.

Why is bhramari important in stress management?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bhramari pranayama has a deeply soothing effect on the nerves, especially for people who are physically and mentally in a rush. It has been found that bhramari stimulates alpha brainwaves. This effect is felt even more intensely when one comes home from work. After three or four rounds of bhramari a state of deep relaxation, awareness and alertness is felt. The sound vibrations emitted during bhramari, in conjunction with concentration in the centre of the head where the sound is being felt, help tranquillize and relax the agitated state of the brain by inducing alpha brainwaves. Bhramari is a very effective technique to reduce hypertension.

Physical tension is created when practising the bandhas – how can this relieve stress?

Swami Niranjanananda: Bandhas are locks and there are three areas of the body which get blocked or locked when under stress or tension. Many people notice that when they are under pressure the stomach becomes tight, or the perineum becomes tight, or the neck becomes tight. Tension headaches can result from tightening of the neck muscles.

This is unconscious tensing, while bandhas are conscious tensing. Unconscious tensing creates stress and conscious tensing releases stress, as the process and movement are being controlled. This means tension is not being created, it is being controlled and guided.

These three areas reflect the stresses of the body. There is another important factor in relation to this, an example of which is seen in soldiers. Soldiers tend to be very tight in the stomach region, which means that manipura is activated and

tensed – so they have a lot of aggression and they are very dynamic as this whole area is in a state of fight or flight.

Similarly, when contraction occurs in the perineal region, there is fear and insecurity, as mooladhara and swadhisthana chakras have been tightened. Yet when mooladhara and swadhisthana are consciously blocked at the time of practising the perineal lock, *moola bandha*, psychological and mental tensions and stresses can be released.

For manipura, *uddiyana bandha*, contraction of the abdomen, is done so that the energy of manipura can be released. Similarly, when the neck is tense and tight at the end of an intense day of work, one moves the neck up and down to release the pressure. This is why yogis have prescribed *jalandhara bandha*, the chin lock, for the neck.

How can yoga help armed forces personnel to manage mental stress?

Swami Niranjanananda: Mental stress is caused by the work environment, the family environment and the social environment. In 1993, the late General Joshi, Chief of the Armed Forces in India, approached the Bihar School of Yoga to train army personnel, especially in the Siachen and Bikaner areas which have extreme climatic variations of heat and cold.

Two swamis conducted specific training programs in Leh and in base camps in the Siachen and Bikaner areas. While conducting these programs they also underwent similar exertions to the army personnel in order to experience for themselves what happens, how to cope with it and how to teach the soldiers to cope with it. The results were incredible, especially in the Siachen base camp. The soldiers face enormous difficulties in those harsh conditions; at altitudes of up to 6,000 metres, surrounded by ice and snow, their worst enemies are acute isolation and deprivation of communication. They suffer a great deal from mental and emotional stress as they live without receiving any communication from their families for two years. At that time what is their mental condition and state of mind?

In the Siachen base camp five practices to help the soldiers manage their physical, mental and emotional stress were trialled: a group of asanas known as the pawanmuktasana series, pranayama, trataka, ajapa japa, and yoga nidra.

In normal conditions the concentration practice of trataka, fixation of the gaze on the tip of a candle flame, helps to improve concentration, one-pointed awareness, but in those extreme conditions, it also helped to stop dissipation of the emotions and thoughts, and to reduce the level of fear, insecurity and anxiety. The practice of ajapa japa was also taught: repetition of a mantra with inhalation and exhalation. This practice was found to be an efficient tool to manage psychological problems and disturbances which the armed forces face in harsh climatic conditions and total isolation. The most important practice we taught the soldiers was yoga nidra, relaxation. If one can incorporate a component of relaxation into one's life, not sleep but relaxation, life will change drastically and dramatically. People have lost the ability to relax.

What is the psychological effect of forward bending asanas?

Swami Satyananda: Medical science attaches great importance to the solar plexus in the abdominal cavity near the suprarenal glands, and defines it as part of the large network of sympathetic nerve ganglia and fibres.

Yogically this region is regarded as a centre of *pranic* energy, or vital energy, which supplies the whole body with vitality and strength. Notably, this nerve plexus is connected to the suprarenal medulla, which secretes the hormone adrenalin. This hormone, often referred to as the 'fight or flight hormone', prepares the body for emergencies. During periods of fear, anxiety, stress, or any threatening situation, the body automatically becomes functionally more efficient. This is attained by bodily changes brought about immediately by the stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system, via the central nervous system. This is followed by

the secretion of adrenalin into the bloodstream which exactly duplicates the effects of the stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system. This mobilizes all the resources of the body to help face an emergency condition.

It can be generally stated that chronic overactivity of the adrenal glands or the nervous centres of the solar plexus are associated with mental states of anxiety and stress. During forward bending poses these functions are relaxed and normalized, so that mental states of relative tranquillity and calmness can be produced. People who are prone to psychological tension will find these asanas invaluable.

Conversely, underactivity of these functions can be associated with lethargy and lack of energy. By normalizing their activity, forward bending poses can bring about increased vitality in the practitioner.

Why is relaxing in shavasana important?

Swami Satyananda: Shavasana is the corpse pose. *Shav* means 'corpse'. This asana has been adapted from the tantric practice of shavasana in which the sadhaka sits on the corpse and practises his mantra. Shavasana is also known as the pose of relaxation and it is essential to practise this in between other asanas or after a hectic day. Shavasana is described in *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (1:32):

*Uttaanam shavavadbhoomau shayanam tachchhavaasanam;
Shavaasanam shraantiharam chittavishraantikaarakam.*

Lying flat on the ground with the face upwards, in the manner of a dead body, is shavasana. It removes tiredness and enables the mind (and whole body) to relax.

Shavasana is a simple practice but most people find it almost impossible to completely relax the body. There is a tendency to hold tension in some part. The whole body must relax, then the breathing will simultaneously slow down. One must try to ignore the mental chatter and concentrate only on the breath and body.

This practice is useful for developing body awareness and pratyahara. When the body is completely relaxed, awareness of the mind develops. Its effects influence the physical as well as the psychological structure. It is useful in yogic management of high blood pressure, peptic ulcer, anxiety, hysteria, cancer and all psychosomatic diseases and neuroses.

Shavasana is beneficial no matter what the condition is, even in perfect health, because it brings up latent impressions buried within the subconscious mind, and the mind which operates during waking consciousness relaxes and subsides. It is, therefore, necessary to practise shavasana for developing dharana and dhyana. Even though it is a static pose it revitalizes the entire system.

Why is shavasana an important practice for stress management?

Swami Satyananda: Shavasana is an easy and useful method of giving peace to the body and mind. It is a unique method of complete relaxation, and also an aid to sensory withdrawal. If there is a guru by one's side to give instructions in shavasana, one can be led to the highest meditative state through this practice. Although shavasana does not lead to samadhi, it can be used as a preparation for that. Most tragedies belong to the sphere of the psyche. People suffer on account of self-hypnosis created by opinions, self-consciousness, prejudices, false notions of poverty, pomp, delusions and the like. Shavasana is a process of de-hypnotism which counteracts much negative autosuggestion. Those who want to reform their lives and realize their potential can do so by practising shavasana

Those who sincerely want to mould their character and give up bad habits will also be greatly benefited. Supposing one has the bad habit of abusing, as if compelled to do it by some unseen force. Take up shavasana regularly, and at the end of the deep relaxation superimpose positive resolves upon your astral body by making a *sankalpa*, a resolution for change. In this way practise shavasana regularly for fifteen

days and the habit of abusing will go away without the least struggle.

Due to the nature of their duties, doctors, lawyers, teachers and businessmen accumulate muscular and mental tensions in their daily profession. They are greatly benefited by the practice of shavasana. It is also a wonderful psychological cure for those who suffer from insomnia, or disturbances of sleep. What is the difference between sleep and shavasana? Normally when one goes to sleep, it is without quietening the mind. The blood circulation is not moderated so the heart is still working hard; tensions and congestions remain unsettled in one's being.

In normal sleep, day-to-day irregularities remain unsettled and unadjusted. Shavasana is really attained when tensions are eased, blood circulation is calmed down and other congestions are cleared by this scientific method. Shavasana brings good, high quality sleep.

INSOMNIA

How can yoga help insomnia?

Swami Satyananda: For insomnia, first practice trataka, then yoga nidra. These practices will relieve insomnia, but there is something else one has to do. Why does one have insomnia? Because one thinks and thinks and thinks.

What effect does trataka have on sleep?

Swami Niranjanananda: The sixth shatkarma is trataka, which is one of the important practices of pratyahara. If trataka is practised at night before going to bed, when one lies down, the mind is absolutely quiet, there is no *vikshepa* of mind, there is no confusion or movement of mind. Trataka is a most effective technique to focus the mind, clearing it of confusion, conflict, stress and tension.

The brain has a large visual centre. When the vision is confined to observing a flame only, and the eyes are not moving around grasping objects and seeing images, the

brain is not processing them, so at that time there is cerebral relaxation. The cerebral relaxation combined with mental harmony and the state of concentration changes the entire quality of sleep, consciousness and mind.

Australian research has shown that *trataka* practised at night on a candle flame stimulates the production of melatonin. Melatonin is a hormone produced by the pineal gland in the head. The pineal gland is inactive during the day, but with the coming of darkness it wakes up and secretes melatonin. Melatonin is an important hormone which regulates the body clock: it is only produced at night, in darkness, and it causes one to feel sleepy, ready for bed. Melatonin also helps regulate the female reproductive cycle and has powerful antioxidant effects, meaning it enhances the immune system. With the coming of dawn, melatonin levels subside, and one is ready to wake and start the day.

Research has shown that if *trataka* is practised at night on a flame, for only one or two minutes, the melatonin production increases. It must be practised in darkness, and after this brief practice, one must go straight to bed, without turning on the light, as bright light stops the effect. The quality of sleep is totally different when *trataka* is practised at night.

Along with practising *trataka*, a regulated lifestyle is a must. Irregular sleep and waking times, dietary indiscretions, high stress levels, indulgence in sensory pleasures and an unbalanced attitude towards life, all put off the desired effects.

Trataka can also have the opposite effect: if it is practised for too long, people often find that they can't sleep. When *trataka* is practised, the mind relaxes, as the state of concentration stops the mind from distracting itself and going in hundreds of directions, giving birth to different kinds of thoughts. When the mind is concentrated, the thoughts automatically align themselves and there is no dissipation or distraction. This is an alert state, not a drowsy state. The eyes are the *jnanendriya*, the sense organ,

associated with manipura chakra, therefore when trataka is practised for some time, it has an effect on manipura, making one feel energetic. If trataka is practised for half an hour, after that there will be no sleep, no matter how tired or exhausted one was before.

It should be remembered that the state of relaxation arising from trataka is important for another reason. Once there is sufficient relaxation, one acquires concentration, and the attitudes change. The attitude changes with the relaxation of mind and it is this change in attitude, it is this relaxation of mind, which makes one's life happier and healthier. In yoga one aspires to live gracefully: that grace is an outcome of a harmonious and balanced perception of life.

What will help insomnia and anxiety?

Swami Satyananda: The practice of ujjayi pranayama with the mantra *Om*, although it is so simple, has subtle influences on the whole body as well as the psychic plane. It calms the nervous system and removes all worries and troubles from the mind.

People who suffer from insomnia should have a quiet, deep sleep if they practise this technique in bed at night. They should lie in shavasana without any pillow. When the head is elevated by a pillow, it obstructs the breath from passing through the already contracted glottis.

This practice is also useful for people with high blood pressure as it reduces the heartbeat.

MOOD MANAGEMENT

How do the body and mind affect each other?

Swami Sivananda: The mind is intimately connected with the body. The mind acts upon the body and the body reacts upon the mind. The mind influences the body – a pure, healthy mind means a healthy body. Grief in the mind weakens the body. The body influences the mind in its turn. If the body is strong and healthy, the mind also becomes healthy and strong.

If the body is sick, the mind also becomes sick. A pain in the stomach causes depression in the mind.

The primary cause of diseases which afflict the body is bad thoughts. Whatever is held in the mind will be produced in the physical body. Any ill-feeling or bitterness towards another person at once affects the body and produces some kind of disease in the body. Intense passion, hatred, long-standing bitter jealousy, corroding anxiety, fits of hot temper actually destroy the cells of the body and induce disease of the heart, liver, kidneys, spleen and stomach. Violent fits of hot temper do serious damage to the brain cells, throw poisonous chemical products into the blood, produce general shock and depression and suppress the secretion of gastric juice, bile and other digestive juices in the alimentary canal, drain away energy and vitality, induce premature old age and shorten life.

When the mind is agitated, the body is agitated. Wherever the body goes, the mind follows. When both the body and mind are agitated the prana flows in the wrong direction. Instead of pervading the whole body steadily and equally it will vibrate at an unequal rate, without rhythm.

How can anger be managed with hatha yoga?

Swami Sivananda: Prana entwines the mind like a creeper. Pranayama leads to the control of mind. Pranayama will put a break on the impulse of speech. It gives one an abundance of energy to check anger.

Do asanas and pranayama affect feelings and moods?

Swami Sivananda: When one is not practising yoga, the nervous system is slow, and as a result, there is a sort of depression. Additionally, the energy in the body usually remains blocked at one or more centres as the nervous system is not activated. When yoga asanas and pranayamas are practised, the various systems in the body, such as the respiratory, circulatory, cardiac and nervous systems, are properly activated. As a result of this, the feelings in the

brain that had been blocked are released, and pranic energy is introduced into the higher centres of the brain, allowing one to feel light and relaxed.

What effect does the endocrine system have on behaviour?

Swami Satyananda: Recent scientific research has brought a fundamental finding into the limelight: the effect of endocrine secretions on the human mind, human behaviour and human emotion. The endocrine glands are the pituitary gland, pineal, thyroid, thymus, pancreas, adrenals and the ovaries and testes.

Scientists have come to the conclusion that if one is angry by nature, there may be something wrong with the glands. If one thinks too much, then it is possible that some glands are over functioning. Endocrine secretions have an effect on human action, human behaviour, and human thinking. If one is always angry, or too emotional, or if one thinks too much, or sleeps too much, or worries too much, or is too self-conscious, it may be due to some kind of fault in the endocrine system.

There are various asanas which influence the endocrine secretions. For example, *siddhasana*, the adept's pose, influences sex secretions, *sarvangasana*, the shoulder stand pose, influences the thyroid glands, while *halasana*, the plough pose, influences pancreatic and adrenal secretions.

Why do yogis use the breath to harmonize the body and mind?

Swami Niranjanananda: The breath is a reflection of the state of mind. If one is agitated, the breathing is rapid; if one is angry, the breathing is short and shallow; if one is relaxed, the breathing is long and deep. The states of mind are reflected in how one breathes. Sometimes the breath may not even be noticeable, it is so gentle.

By watching the breath of somebody, one can know what kind of mood that person is in, whether it is an aggressive mood, a quiet mood, a depressive mood or a frustrated

mood. All the symptoms of mental behaviour and mood can be observed in the way one breathes in and out.

For this reason, yogis use the breath to regulate and harmonize the physical systems, like the nervous system. They use the breath to tranquillize the functions of the mind.

How can hatha yoga help control anger, jealousy and fear?

Swami Satyananda: Anger is one of the biggest barriers in life and jealousy is absolutely unnecessary and useless. Habitual anger means there is too much adrenalin in the system. The nervous system and glands react promptly to the various mental states.

One should never become involved with jealousy or anger, but if necessary the practice of *shashankasana*, the hare pose, will help. *Shashankasana* helps to control the adrenal glands and calms the mind. Practising *shashankasana* daily soon brings about a total change in the nature of one's physiological behaviour.

To overcome a fear complex, practise *shashankasana* and *antar mouna*, inner silence. If *shashankasana* is practised for half an hour daily, the secretion of adrenalin can be controlled and the fright and fear will gradually diminish. In *antar mouna*, let the fear come and just witness it, observing the effects it has on the mind, body and emotions. After some time the cause of the fear will be realized, and it will be seen to be rooted in a forgotten childhood experience. If one practises *shashankasana*, *antar mouna* and *pranayama* regularly, after some time the childhood experience will be relived in the mind and all fear will vanish like a miracle.

How can hatha yoga be used to reduce aggression?

Swami Satyananda: Aggression can be combated by the practice of the cooling breaths, *sheetali* and *seetkari* *pranayamas*, but first a thorough study should be made of one's personality. Aggression is part of one's nature that develops during the course of life and sometimes

psychological disturbances can be caused by trying to arrest a natural aspect of the personality.

Although pranayama is suggested, one's nature should be channelled into constructive and creative work. A person with an aggressive nature can be very dynamic. He can use his personality to bring about great changes in society.

How can anger be managed with yoga?

Swami Satyananda: About forty years ago, I had a confrontation with my guru, Swami Sivananda. He was a very calm, quiet, forgiving, forbearing, enduring and compassionate swami, but somehow I got very angry. I was young in those days, twenty-one. I threw the bunch of keys at his feet and said, "Look after your own ashram!" Then I went to my room and closed the door. I was so angry I did not know what to do. For two days I did not come out of my room and I did not eat anything.

On the third day, he called me and said, "You are very angry." I said, "Yes." He said, "Don't be sorry about it; find a way." I said, "But I have been thinking about it so much. Every morning I make a resolve that I will not get angry, I will not lose my temper, but later I forget it." He said, "Your energies are in disarray." So he taught me one yoga posture called shashankasana and told me to practise it for as long as I could.

At first I practised that asana for ten minutes at one stretch, later I used to practise it for three hours, because for me there was no other problem during my youth except anger. I had so much anger that I could have killed anybody. I couldn't control it. So I thought, 'If I can control anger, I can control anything in life.' Of course, everybody has their own problem. My problem was anger; your problem may be something else. I practised shashankasana and it did help me.

Earlier than that, I practised many different systems. I studied in a convent school with Christian sisters who used to teach me that when you get angry, you should not

do this and you should do that, but nothing worked. The swamis or priests in India used to tell me, “When you get angry, drink water.” Everybody suggested every possible method. You know, once I got so angry with my father because he told me not to go out in the evening, I just took a rifle and threatened to shoot him. This was the type of anger I had, but just by the practice of shashankasana, it was finished. How?

This anger was not a psychological process. It was just a process related to the glandular balance. In shashankasana, what do you do? You bend forward and there is tension or stimulus created in the adrenal glands and they secrete a little more or a little less adrenalin according to the requirement of the system. When the adrenalin is injected and absorbed by the system, then the chemistry in the body changes and the behaviour of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems also changes.

When there is balance between sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, there is calmness and tranquillity. So, in the science of hatha yoga, the body, mind, emotions, intellect and feelings are all interrelated. They are not considered as different from each other. Your mental problems, conflicts, psychosis, schizophrenia, anger, excessive passions, lack of memory, absence of coordination, exhaustion, guilt, or even lack of passion, may be due to a faulty system in the body.

What is the effect of shambhavi mudra on the moods?

Swami Niranjanananda: Shambhavi mudra, gazing at the eyebrow centre, calms the mind, thus removing emotional stress and anger. Concentration, mental stability and the state of thoughtlessness are developed.

What is the effect of nasikagra drishti on the mind?

Swami Niranjanananda: Nasikagra drishti, nosetip gazing, calms anger and disturbed states of mind. The powers of concentration are developed. If performed with awareness

for a long period, it helps to awaken mooladhara chakra and induce meditative states.

How do the shatkarmas purify the mind as well as the body?

Swami Niranjanananda: The first three shatkarmas, neti, dhauti and basti, free *annamaya kosha*, the food body or physical body, of its defects. The other three shatkarmas are kapalbhati, nauli and trataka, which help contain the agitations of the mind and bring it to a point of focus. Trataka controls the dissipations of the mind. Kapalbhati removes mental tensions. Nauli awakens the centre of pranas in the body, manipura chakra. Yoga begins with these practices.

ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

How can hatha yoga help one deal with anxiety?

Swami Niranjanananda: Anxiety and tension or stress can be experienced on various levels at the same time. The four areas where anxiety and stress are usually experienced are muscular, nervous, cerebral and emotional. Initially the level on which the anxiety is being experienced needs to be identified. The approach will depend on which it is. If one feels anxiety on all levels, a different approach is required.

If the entire body and emotions feel affected by stressful conditions, some simple postures, pranayamas and relaxation should be practised. Postures such as *tadasana*, the palm tree pose, *tiryak tadasana*, the swaying palm tree pose, *kati chakrasana*, the waist rotating pose, and *parwanmuktasana*, the energy releasing poses, are recommended. Pranayamas such as *nadi shodhana*, alternate nostril breathing, and *bhramari*, the humming bee breath, and then some *yoga nidra*, relaxation, should also be done.

Bear in mind that one is not going to be rid of anxiety in one session. It takes continued effort to release blocked energies and to harmonize the energies that are in conflict

with each other, so the practices must be continued until a comfortable state of being is reached.

For emotional anxiety, two practices are helpful. One is *trataka*, gazing at a candle flame, and the other is *antar mouna*, inner silence. Do these sequentially: first practise *trataka*, then *antar mouna*.

How can yoga cure nervousness?

Swami Satyananda: Who becomes nervous? One who can not handle the burden of his feeling and thinking becomes nervous. If ten tonnes of load is put on a truck, it can carry it. If ten tonnes is put on a horse cart, it will break. That is called nervous breakdown. When one thinks beyond the capacity of one's mind, when one feels beyond the capacity of one's mind, when one is happy and sorry beyond the capacity of one's mind, and when one functions beyond the strength of one's mind, the nervous system fails.

First it is called nervousness, then it is called nervous depression, then it is called nervous breakdown; this indicates weakness of mind and weakness of nerves. These nerves carry electrical energy and often there is an imbalance between the two, between the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous systems. Both these nervous systems are attached to the cerebral cortex in the brain. In nervous breakdown, there is an imbalance and they are not able to continue, they are not able to supply the required energy.

This nervousness is of two types: either the mental energy is down, or the physical, pranic energy is down. In yoga the two nadis, *ida nadi* and *pingala nadi*, are talked about. *Ida nadi* carries the mental force and *pingala nadi* carries the pranic force. These two forces are like negative and positive energies which are flowing in one's body. They are actually energy. They have been calculated, they have been registered, they have been examined by modern instruments. These two nadis carrying mental and the pranic force reach every part of one's body. The distribution of this energy takes place through four centres in the spine.

Swadhisthana chakra, manipura chakra, anahata chakra, and vishuddhi chakra are the junctions through which these energies are distributed to various parts of the body. Throughout the body there are 130,000 supplying channels; 130,000 pathways throughout the body to supply the energy everywhere. In addition to these 130,000 nadis, 72,000 nadis terminate in the heart. This means the life force and the mental force, so much of these two energies are supplied to the heart that 72,000 lines are connected to it.

Due to faulty ways of eating and living, however, these nadis become poor in their supply. Too much anxiety causes nervousness. Too much protein causes nervousness. Compare a horse with a tiger. Compare a cow with a dog; the body which is made up of a protein diet is much more excited and stimulated. The tiger is the most nervous creature on this earth; tiger, leopard, panther.

The diet has to be corrected. To improve nervousness, the diet must be changed. Consume whole grain and whole cereal and gradually cut down on animal products. This will improve nervous strength. This will strengthen the heart. A horse can run sixty miles, one hundred miles at one stretch, and does not get a heart attack. What does a horse eat? Does a horse eat fish? Does a horse eat five eggs in the morning?

Nervousness is also on account of the imbalance in the hormonal system, which can be corrected by certain yogic postures, like sirshasana and sarvangasana. A combination of asanas, pranayama and diet will help.

What yoga practices help control nervousness?

Swami Satyananda: In every practice of yoga, the emphasis is on tranquillity. In relation to the yoga postures, this is the statement of Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*, *Sthirasukhamaasanam* – “an asana is a steady, pleasant posture.” Therefore in the yogic posture there must be two qualities: steadiness and tranquillity.

Whenever yoga postures are practised, there should be an inner attitude of tranquillity. Yoga postures should be

practised with the eyes closed. Before practising asanas, sit down quietly, close the eyes and chant the mantra *Om* three times, five times, or eleven times. This is the first type of awareness. Then lie down flat on the back with the legs apart. Close the eyes and concentrate on the breathing process, first in the nostrils, then in the abdomen, then finally feel that the whole body is breathing in and out, breathing in and out. Just do this for three minutes. Then sit up and practise the asanas as given by the teacher. Include one round of surya namaskara.

Surya means sun, *namaskara* means inner awareness. It is a combination of twelve postures. The twelve postures represent the twelve zodiac signs of the sun. These twelve postures also represent the twelve great realities inside the body. When the sun is rising, go outside, face the rising sun, inhale and assimilate the cosmic rays. This will help get rid of nervousness, as well as rheumatism. For each posture there is a breathing discipline and a mantra. Each mantra represents one position of the sun in connection with the earth.

There is one more practice for acute nervousness. It is the practice of jalandhara bandha and moola bandha with the breath retained inside. Practise this twice a day on an empty stomach.

These practices must be learned from an experienced teacher. The mind will become steady and nervousness will be forgotten.

How can anxiety be managed with yoga?

Swami Satyananda: There are levels of anxiety. Simple anxiety is felt by everybody – “I have to do this and run to do that and at 8.30 I have to go there.” This is normal anxiety. It is necessary to have this kind of anxiety in order to have proper control of the mind. Anxiety has a psychological and biological basis: it has much to do with the relationship between parents and their children.

Imbalance in the hormones is another cause of anxiety. The endocrine glands, such as the adrenal glands and the

gonads, play an important part in how one feels. Anxiety may be suppressed or over-expressed. People who suppress their sexual feelings tend to have more anxiety.

The problem of hormonal imbalance can first be tackled with hatha yoga, then by working out one's feelings. Free expression of all sentiments will not work because society is a mixture of many types of people, and if one starts dancing and singing it won't be accepted. Some respectable, civilized way of expressing feelings has to be found; one must try not to express anxiety and neurosis in a wild way.

What can be done? Practise antar mouna: in antar mouna, whatever comes into the mind, let it come! Sing kirtan. Like-minded people must join and go slowly; they must become one with the rhythm. When one identifies totally with the rhythm, inhibitions are overcome and things begin to happen. This gives temporary relief from anxiety.

In certain types of anxiety *kumbhaka*, retention of breath, is very good but everybody cannot practise retention. Kumbhaka can only be used after yoga has been practised for some time.

How effective is trataka at reducing anxiety?

Swami Niranjanananda: In normal life the concentration practice of trataka, fixing the gaze on the tip of a candle flame, helps to improve concentration and one-pointed awareness. In situations of extreme stress, it helps stop dissipation of the emotions and thoughts and reduce levels of fear, insecurity and anxiety.

What can be done about the rise in anxiety-related illness?

Swami Satyananda: The new diseases that are arising are due to the restless and anxious mind. No medicine can ever tackle them. Even if a new system is given to society, these disease patterns will continue. They are part and parcel of the pace of modern life. The only way out of the problem is through yoga. That is why Western society has taken to yoga, not because yoga is something new.

How can yoga help manage depression?

Swami Satyananda: There are 72,000 main channels which conduct the pranic energy and the mental energy throughout the body and feed their system. If there is any imbalance in the nervous systems and in these nadi channels, it is experienced by the person in the form of nervous breakdown, nervous depression.

Nervous depression is a vague expression. These nervous systems are directed by the ida and pingala nadis. Ida is the source of mental energy and pingala is the source of pranic energy. Nervous depression could be on the plane of pranic energy. Before yogic treatment is undertaken one has to analyze which type of depression it is. If the nervous depression is in the realm of the nadis that conduct mental energy, raja yoga must be practised. If the depression is due to imbalance in the pranic channels, one has to practise pranayama.

Some general suggestions for practices can be made, but a program should be given according to each individual. The first practice that is important for people suffering from nervous system imbalance is *siddhasana*, the accomplished pose. Siddhasana is an important posture for people suffering from nervous depression, particularly for yogis.

The next practice is moola bandha. Moola bandha is contraction of the perineum. The centre located between the urinary and excretory outlets is known as *mooladhara chakra*, at the coccygeal plexus, or perineum. At the same time as moola bandha is practised, *jalandhara bandha*, the chin lock, is performed. When jalandhara bandha is practised the breath must be held according to the ratio used in one's pranayama practise.

Moola bandha can be learned gradually by practising ashwini mudra, contraction and expansion of the rectum and coccyx. When this has been achieved, moola bandha can be tried. Once moola bandha is mastered, go on to the next practice, which is most important. It is known as tadan kriya.

Tadan means beating. *Tadan kriya* is one of the practices of tantra; it is one of the practices of kriya yoga. First one sits in *padmasana*, the lotus posture. In that position, the body is raised on the two palms and the buttocks are slowly beaten on the floor. These are two important practices for nervous depression.

How can yoga help in the management of depression and nervous breakdown?

Swami Satyananda: First, there is nervous depression, and when it is not taken care of, there is nervous breakdown. Nervous breakdown means that the nervous system refuses to function.

In yoga there are two nervous systems; one is called *ida*, the other is called *pingala*. In modern science they are called the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. These nervous systems act as shock absorbers. Each and every sense experience passes through these nervous systems. If the sense experience is normal, these nervous systems act normally. If, however, the sense experiences are explosive, the nervous system receives shocks. Therefore in yoga, nervous depression and nervous breakdown are considered to be two different illnesses.

The symptoms of nervous depression are: the body is weak, it sweats a lot, horripilation takes place from time to time, the skin burns, one cannot stand for very long, and the mind keeps thinking all the time. One sees only negativity everywhere, only inauspiciousness. These symptoms indicate nervous depression.

At this time one should practise the hatha yoga shatkarmas. A few of these are purificatory, and a few are relaxing. A combination of these practices will avert nervous depression.

When nervous breakdown takes place, things are entirely different. There is difficulty with the coronary system, there is no appetite, the fear of death is always in the mind, and no light can be seen anywhere in life. Nothing works, even

psychiatric treatment does not work. If it works at all, it works through drugs.

At this time it is best to retire to a place which is spiritually charged. Seclusion must be avoided, loneliness must be avoided, but crowds should also be avoided. Always be in the company of people who are spiritual. In India the tradition is very simple. When someone is undergoing a nervous breakdown they are sent to the ashram to live for some time. The diet is corrected, the methods of daily living are corrected, and at the same time practices of yoga are given, like yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, dharana and dhyana.

What is the effect of maha mudra on depression?

Swami Satyananda: Many people who were heading towards suicide, suffering from manias, or on the verge of a nervous breakdown have been helped by the kriya known as *maha mudra*, the great posture. This one kriya, maha mudra, brought about a tremendous change in their psychological makeup. Why is this? Maha mudra is very simple and it only takes seven to nine minutes to perform, although it has to be done perfectly, systematically, according to the instructions of the teacher. This kriya is a way, a panacea, a remedy for everyone. Suicidal tendencies, manias, psychological and psychosomatic ailments are international in nature, so an international system is needed to eliminate them. That international system is yoga, and it is in this light that yoga is brought to you.

In many cases of chronic depression, of constitutional and habitual depression, there is no better way than maha mudra. One person who had decided to commit suicide, happened to inform me of what he was intending to do, and wanted me to tell him what he should do because he wanted to die. I said, "One way is to shoot yourself, the second way is to take some drastic drug, and the third way I will teach you, so come tomorrow morning." And of course, he lives even today; he told me that he had been thinking of committing suicide for over five years but was not sure which way to do it.

After the practice of maha mudra, he overcame this state of utter depression on a permanent basis. This does not mean that maha mudra is only meant as an anti-depression method, because maha mudra is intended to awaken the higher mind. I am referring to depression because depression is a disease which everyone suffers from at some period of life. Some suffer during youth, others suffer in middle age, and before death most people suffer from depression. Therefore, it is necessary for all of us to know how depression is an important part of our personality and how it should be dealt with in order to have a better standard of experience.

Many people become exhausted by life – how can hatha yoga solve this problem?

Swami Niranjanananda: In order to make the body and mind free from disease and disorders, purification is important. *Shodhanam*, which means purification, is listed in *Gheranda Samhita* as the first of the sadhanas necessary for a sadhaka.

Generally, people pursue physical pleasure or follow thought processes through which they seek to advance themselves. Due to the effort they put into it, they naturally come to expect success. When failure comes instead, disappointment follows. In normal life a person then feels tired, physically, mentally and emotionally, but a yogi does not feel tired. Here tiredness does not mean the way the body feels after physical labour. It means *virakti*, disinterest.

Many people say that they are tired of fighting with life. There is no interest in doing anything; the mind does not like anything, as if there is no desire left. Sometimes this state of tiredness is so deep that there is no interest in the family, eating, reading, writing and so on. Lack of interest is evident in every field of life. There is depression. However, there is no such lack of interest in the dictionary of yogis.

These deep feelings of exhaustion and disinterest are created when the past keeps revolving in the mind side by side with concern about the future. When the past is related

with the future and not with the present, a state of virakti, indifference, disinterest, is created. A yogi remains unaffected by such physical and mental activities. When physical and mental purity are attained through hatha yoga, this affects the inner self, the *antahkarana*. Ahankara, buddhi and chitta are the three main components of the antahkarana.

How can yoga help those who feel suicidal?

Swami Satyananda: One surprising fact is that suicidal complexes have been tackled successfully in the simplest way, by revitalizing the sacral gland or the muscles belonging to the sacral system; that is, mooladhara chakra. Mooladhara chakra, in the region of the sacral plexus, is a vital centre which influences the whole brain.

Those who have a tendency to contemplate suicide, who are completely desperate and totally frustrated, instead of giving them a dose of religion or processing them through psychological treatment, can change their attitude to life by revitalizing the sacral plexus or mooladhara chakra.

What can be done when someone is suicidal?

Swami Satyananda: There is a story which illustrates the power of moola bandha. Years ago, a lady came to me when I was staying in New York. She rang me one night and said, “I want to die, but first I want to meet you.” So I told her, “Okay you can, but there is no point in meeting me and then dying because I am a man who gives life. I won’t allow you to die. If you want to die please don’t come to me.”

Next morning she came and I taught her maha bandha, which is moola bandha combined with jalandhara and uddiyana bandhas. She practised in siddha yoni asana, because mooladhara in the feminine body is situated in the cervical area. She practised moola bandha regularly, up to twenty times every day, and by this simple technique she got a new life. When she first came to me she was suffering from conflicts and guilt, and wanted to commit suicide. But now she is very much alive and is one of my assets, teaching yoga to many others.

MENTAL ILLNESS

What type of yoga is used for managing mental illness?

Swami Niranjanananda: A lot of work has been done on using yoga for the management of physical ailments and problems, and some work has been done on the management of mental problems and disorders. These are specialized areas of yoga.

In order to receive help for psychological problems one must go to a proper yoga teacher who understands human nature. The entire system of yoga within the tradition can be considered a form of psychotherapy in which one learns to manage the conscious, subconscious and unconscious behaviours of the mind. Those who have studied traditional yoga in the form of the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali will know the statement near the beginning which says that yoga is control of the modifications of mind: this is regarded as the classical text on yoga, and the entire approach is to teach the management of the human mind.

Physical practices of yoga play only a small part in the *Yoga Sutras*, only meditative asanas are described. Other treatises on yoga describe systems such as hatha and bhakti yoga, but most of the yogic literature has dealt with the mind. The yogic system of mind management is gradually evolving for application in society, and is becoming a powerful tool in the management of mental, emotional and psychic imbalances.

From our understanding it is possible to treat different mental imbalances and reach a 'normal' state through the practices of yoga but it takes time, no doubt. If somebody is under medication, under treatment, then combining the treatment with yoga psychotherapy is very useful.

What is the potential of yoga for helping the mentally ill?

Swami Niranjanananda: To be frank, there is little that yoga can do for mental illness. By the time that type of behaviour has manifested, the faculties of the mind have been reduced,

if not eliminated. What is the condition of willpower and the strength of self-confidence in such persons? When someone is mad, observe whether they have any self-confidence or willpower; or whether they are totally dissipated. One can try, but nothing can be guaranteed.

If by certain asanas, pranayamas, concentration and relaxation practices, or by implanting certain ideas, the level of their willpower and confidence can be raised, there is hope, otherwise it is extremely difficult. I would tend not to agree with people who claim to treat mental illness through yoga; recovery depends on the patient and not on the yoga. Yoga can only provide a system, a method. It is the stamina of the patient which provides the real treatment.

How can yoga help in the management of schizophrenia?

Swami Satyananda: In order to lead a schizophrenic back to normal behaviour, the practices of yoga must be used. First, hatha yoga techniques are needed to purify the glands and nervous system, then raja and jnana yoga can be introduced. After this, if karma yoga is practised, progress will be rapid; karma yoga is the most powerful method.

At the Bihar School of Yoga a number of schizophrenics have successfully been treated, but there is often a problem. Although the yogic therapy is powerful and effective, it does not always complete the cure, because people return to the same situation where they became schizophrenic. They go back to the same family, the same work, the same habits, food and environment, and the work of the ashram is undone. That is the reason the full cure which is possible through yoga practices is rarely achieved.

In Scandinavia the swamis used to go to the mental hospitals in Denmark and Sweden and teach the patients the cleansing practises of hatha yoga and other techniques. Several patients were cured and discharged from the hospital but the swamis were concerned about their rehabilitation as it seemed their social environment would only make them crazy again. So an establishment was created where they

could stay and work with the ashram, teaching yoga, and writing and printing books. If a patient is observed carefully, and the diet and daily activities are regulated, then yoga can definitely help.

What asana and pranayama are recommended for people with mental illness?

Swami Niranjanananda: People who are mentally disturbed need the stimulating pranayamas, such as kapalbhati, frontal brain breathing, and bhastrika, bellows breathing.

In asana practice, apart from the general practices, three postures are important: tadasana, palm tree pose; ardha matsyendrasana, half spinal twist, and gatyatmak paschimottanasana, dynamic back stretch from the lying position. These three asanas are very helpful as they work on the three regions where blockages occur: mooladhara, manipura and vishuddhi. The practices need to be gradually introduced, allowing the effects of each one to be felt, allowing the changes to be seen, before introducing a new practice.

Of course, one should start with the practices of pawanmuktasana to ground those who have lost contact with their bodies and help them become more aware.

How can yoga help people with mental illness?

Swami Niranjanananda: People with mental illness – that's a very broad group. What kind of illness? Since the question is so broad, only a general program can be suggested.

Mentally ill people have the tendency of being over-stressed. They have absolutely no control over their mental activity, they are too disturbed, too distracted. Something which will initially help is to reduce the level of stress – minimize stressful situations and introduce relaxation, simple basic pranayamas and simple stretching exercises, not even necessarily pawanmuktasana part one, but things like tadasana and tiryak tadasana, to release tightness and tension from the muscles and joints. Once they are in tune

with these practices, pawanmuktasana parts one and two, and the shakti bandhas can be introduced. No meditation.

How can yoga help manage hyperactivity?

Swami Niranjanananda: The practice of *nadi shodhana*, alternate nostril breathing, helps manage hyperactivity and induce tranquillity.

How does yoga treat conditions such as depression and anorexia?

Swami Satyananda: In yoga one point must be made clear: if a disease originates in the body, it travels to the mind and then back to the body again; if it originates in the mind, it travels to the body and then back to the mind again. Sickness is not only physiological or psychological, it is both; body and mind interact with each other.

This is why for conditions such as depression or anorexia, a combination of practices is recommended, including physical postures to affect hormonal secretion, breathing practices to remove respiratory congestion and purify the blood, and psychic sleep, in which the deeper realms of the body and mind relax.

How can yoga treat long-term depression?

Swami Satyananda: When a person is suffering from depression, bhastrika should be practised in stages. First mellow or mild bhastrika, gradually built up to fast, intense, violent bhastrika. It is not meant for everybody, it is only meant for those unfortunate souls who are deeply depressed. Bhastrika is practised intensely, then lie flat on the floor and contract the rectum, contract the abdomen, contract the throat, and stop the breath. Release it after sometime. Repeat it a number of times. If one feels tired, lie down flat.

During this process that person may become very restless, wanting to cry, wanting to shout; they should do it. If they want to sing or roll in the room, they should do it. Or jump and dance, do it. Or throw off the clothes, do it, but only in

the room. This takes almost half an hour. This is one of the best pranayamas for people suffering from chronic depression. But it must be remembered that pranayama should never be practised without asanas. And violent pranayama must never be practised without complete preparation.

In the morning, one should get out of bed, prepare about a litre of warm saline water, drink it quickly and bring it up quickly – this is the practice of kunjla. Then have a bath, practise asanas, practise japa, practise other pranayamas: this is preparation for the bhastrika. First mild bhastrika, then increase the intensity until the breath is like a hurricane in the room. Then lie flat on the floor, contract the three centres for as long as possible, release them, repeat it. After that, if one starts doing funny things, it is because when the pranas wake up, the body becomes active. One starts singing and dancing and so many things. Many people throw away their clothes, becoming sort of crazy for the time being. But it is not bad, because when a person suffering from depression comes out of the crisis, there are certain manifestations which appear to be crazy, but that person is on his way to resurrection. In between there are certain symptoms which should never be misunderstood by family members.

How can moola bandha be used to manage mental illness?

Swami Satyananda: As a mental relaxant, moola bandha has been found extremely useful in the treatment of such mental disorders as depression, neurosis, some phobias, hysteria and mania.

Many cases of severe depression have cleared up quickly and without emotional or psychic trauma through the practice of moola bandha, even when the individuals concerned were close to suicide. They experienced old memories, emotions, and experiences, but because of training in detached awareness, the memories passed into consciousness and out again, like bubbles floating harmlessly to the surface and bursting.

Little experimental evidence exists to substantiate the effects of moola bandha on psychosis. However, because of its effects on the brain and by virtue of the fact that moola bandha is effective in the treatment of both mania and depression, it has proved useful in correcting the extreme moods characteristic of manic-depressive psychosis, and in some cases of schizophrenia, especially in the early stages if the personality has been previously stable. This is because moola bandha is a mental purgative, releasing the subconscious and unconscious mind of suppressed anxieties and hidden mental blocks which are beyond the consciousness, yet cause difficulties in life.

So moola bandha has the potential to release one from the depressions, neuroses and other psychological problems that dampen joy in life and prevent fulfilment of one's potential through raising of kundalini shakti. Moola bandha is safe as long as it is practised according to the instructions, efficient and simple. Coupled with its purgative qualities, capable of spring cleaning the mental and emotional body, moola bandha is a technique to open the door to freedom, joy and liberation.

It must be remembered that such problems should be handled under the expert guidance of an experienced teacher, guru, or healer who will combine moola bandha with other practices such as asanas, pranayama, kundalini kriyas, bandhas, mudras, and so on. The amount of practice will obviously vary from case to case, and should be coupled with an adequate diet, a positive attitude, and willingness to forfeit certain behaviour patterns directly attributed to the cause of the complaint.

Moola bandha should not be used therapeutically in high energy diseases of the physical body such as high blood pressure, vertigo, high intracranial pressure or amenorrhoea (absent menstrual period).

How can yoga help those with severe mental illness?

Swami Niranjanananda: Some such people are permanently institutionalized, while others live in the community. Can

these mad, out of control states be classified as states of mind? According to yogic belief, the mind has its centres of gravity to which it is spontaneously and naturally attracted in the normal state, but it can come out of those centres. In some cases, when the mind is highly sensitive, it tends to identify with a particular event, situation, thought, emotion or feeling and become obsessed with that. When the obsession becomes so acute that the mind is not able to project its natural state, the result is known as imbalance or madness; it is given different labels, depending on the intensity. In respect to yogic therapy, some understanding in this area has been developed. With the use of drugs, however, there is suppression. What can be done about this problem?

The drugs that are generally used are stimulants which create momentary hyperactivity in the brain so that the concentration or the obsession is diverted to another area. When the effect of the drug wears off, one again reverts to the same obsession. In the USA, some yoga therapy work was done with people living in mental institutions and halfway homes.

Yoga therapy was given to catatonic patients and other groups for three months. Catatonics have practically no control over their external physiological expression or movement; if one of their arms is up, it will remain like that for hours – someone else has to bring the hand down. Then again it will go up. It is a depressive nervous state in which there is absolutely no control over the functions of the nervous system, no control over the muscular system, nor any interaction taking place between the brain and various parts of the body. The commands are not recognized by the body, and the body does not send any stimulation to the brain.

These patients were given their normal medication before doing yoga, so that they would be a bit more externalized and receptive in order to understand the interaction that was happening with the therapist. After medication, pranayama was practised. They could not do asanas.

It was decided to teach them pranayama, but how to teach it? One of the first practices was activation of pingala nadi; breathing in and out only through the right nostril by blocking the left nostril with cotton or wax. Their left nostril was plugged with wax and left like that for a couple of hours so that pingala would begin. Day in and day out this practice was done, where only pingala would flow. Gradually this change stimulated their nervous system and they became more active. Every day the wax was put in place. That was all that could be done, as there was absolutely no way of teaching them anything.

After a few days of this they began to respond to instructions which were being given to them and became more active. Once they began to respond, other pranayamas were incorporated. The teacher would hold their noses so that they could inhale through the left and exhale through the right. They were then asked to copy. It was like a game which children play, seeing the mirror image. Over a period of time they became used to the practices and would be waiting for the teacher to come. This meant that a certain expectation, a certain improvement had started within them. When the teacher came, they would give a nice smile of recognition as if some friend had come. After about a month we began to see the result of pingala activity and an incredible change came over them later on.

This work continued for three months, then the therapists of the institution were taught the practices so that they could take over the work. In those three months the catatonic patients showed a thirty percent improvement from a chronic depressive catatonic state to being able to recognize and move and be in control of their body. The end result of the practice was that they were eventually able to look after their own needs, relate to the instructions that were being given to them and recognize the situations and environment of the external world. In this way it was discovered that practices which vitalize the pranic system in the body are beneficial in externalizing mental activity.

Simultaneously other patients suffering from schizophrenia, neurosis, deep emotional problems, childhood trauma and shock were worked with. The sessions always began with pranayama and after a month asana could gradually be introduced in the form of a game. By teaching pranayama first, their nervous systems were regulated and their brains activated. After that, with the practice of asana, the physical body could be worked on. In the first month, only pranayama was taught; in the second month, asana and pranayama; in the third month, bandha and shatkarma, neti and kunjai. In some cases, even laghoo shankhaprakshalana was taught, so they would be forced to run to the toilet at least eight to ten times in the day. That purging process had an activating and grounding effect, and made them aware of the necessities and realities of life.

The third month was always the most fulfilling. Along with neti, kunjai, and in some cases laghoo shankhaprakshalana, bandhas were introduced, because bandhas act on the three main energy centres: mooladhara, manipura and vishuddhi. These three energy centres are the three areas of blockage in the body which can be felt at any time. For example, when there is tension in the head, the tightening of the neck muscles is felt, closing off or blocking the mid-brain region. In this way, yoga can definitely help relieve severe mental illness. One has to adopt different methods.

10

Living Yoga

LIFESTYLE AND HEALTH

Why is health vital for a positive lifestyle?

Swami Sivananda: The first wealth is health. It is the greatest of all possessions and the basis of all virtues. Without health, life is not life. The person who has good health has hope, and the person who has hope has everything.

The first requisite in life is good health. Good health is a valuable asset for everyone. If one does not possess good health, one cannot prosper in any walk of life. One should have physical as well as mental health.

Even for spiritual pursuits, good health is the prerequisite. Without good health, one cannot penetrate the hidden depths of the vast ocean of life within and attain the final beatitude. Without good health, one cannot wage war with the turbulent senses and boisterous mind.

Without good health, one cannot achieve anything, serve or do *nishkama karma yoga*, action without expectation of reward. Without good health, one cannot pray, meditate, do any asanas or pranayama. That is the reason why scriptures declare that this body is a boat to cross the ocean of *samsara*, this illusory world, an instrument for doing virtuous deeds and attaining *moksha*, liberation.

The instrument must be kept clean, strong, and healthy. This body is a horse to take one to the goal. If the horse

tumbles down, one cannot reach the destination. If this instrument breaks down, one will not reach the goal of *atma-sakshatkara*, self-realization.

How does nature ensure good health?

Swami Sivananda: What are the ordinary ingredients which help keep one in good health? They are sun, fresh air and pure water. One must spend at least one hour and more if possible in the open air every day. Sunlight helps growth and gives vigour. Breathe pure air, bask in the sun, eat good nutritious, wholesome food, drink pure water and observe cleanliness; you will possess a high standard of health, vim, vigour and vitality.

How important is a natural lifestyle for keeping away disease?

Swami Sivananda: The body is the most marvellous and delicate machine in the world. It is a highly complex mechanism. Even the most eminent doctors in the world have not completely understood its structure and working. One virulent microbe can destroy the body in an instant. It is surrounded on all sides by enemies – and yet we live. This is a great mystery.

Disease is not a condition that ought to frighten one. It is not brought about by outside agencies, but it is the result of the kickings of life. It is a reaction of life to the entry of foreign matter into the system. Disease is only a sign of health.

Life's cleansing process is called disease. There is only one disease and that is dis-ease or no ease. It is the struggle of life to get rid of foreign matter. Disease should not to be suppressed with toxic drugs, but nature should be allowed to get rid of it in her own way.

If one wants radiant health, one ought to return to nature and avail oneself of all the healing agencies in nature, the healing properties of the sun, water, air, earth, the benefits of fasting and herbal plants. Nature tries to keep us healthy,

but we bring on sickness by continuous violation of Her laws. Natural laws are relentless and know no mercy. Therefore, we should observe the laws of nature and eat, drink, sleep, think and conduct ourselves in the way laid down by the ancient sages.

In the animal kingdom, there is seldom any sickness because animals do not violate the laws of nature. Before the age of machinery, life was more natural. People of past generations were much stronger and healthier. Life in the twentieth century is becoming more and more artificial. There is much deterioration in health and strength. In spite of the innumerable doctors and the latest medical discoveries, people's health is deteriorating.

What type of lifestyle promotes good digestion?

Swami Sivananda: Take only simple, light, nourishing food. Immediately after taking food it is highly injurious to bask in the sun, swim, ride or run, sing, sit by the fireside, fight, practise physical exercise or asana, pranayama or study. Rub the feet with oil. This will remove roughness, dryness, heat, fatigue, numbness and fissures of the feet, sciatic pain and produce good sleep.

Walking after dinner promotes life. It gives good health. After food, lie down on the left side for a short time. This helps digestion. Half the stomach should be filled with food, one quarter with water and the last quarter left free for air. A hungry man should not drink water and a thirsty man should not eat food. Taking a large quantity of water during food is harmful. One should take a small quantity of water during meals. Digestion will be affected by drinking a large quantity of water during meals. One must carefully observe the details of one's health, particularly in relation to diet. Milk is easily digestible to some, whereas it causes retching to others. Certain kinds of vegetables are suitable to some systems but they may be quite disagreeable to others. One must avoid too much of sameness, and too much of variety in a meal.

The power of digestion varies from person to person. Therefore, one must discriminate between the right foods suitable to one's constitution and the wrong ones which may cause great harm to one's health. Over and above one should select sattwic pure vegetarian food and have moderation in eating, sleeping, talking, drinking, etc. Many people make themselves ill by eating too much and by not eating the right food at the right time.

Night meals should not be taken after 8 pm, and once a week should be foregone. Complete fasting should be observed once a fortnight. It will give rest to the digestive system, and the assimilative power will be renovated.

Proper elimination is as important as correct diet. Even when the right food is eaten, good health will not be enjoyed unless waste matter is properly removed from the system. One must have a good motion daily in the early morning. When one drinks a sufficient amount of water and flushes the kidneys, good health is enjoyed.

For good health, an adult should take six glasses of water daily in addition to water taken in the form of food. This is enough to flush the body and meet the internal needs. The stomach should not be overloaded. The secret of being healthy and happy is to be a little hungry all the time.

What dietary regulation does hatha yoga recommend for maintenance of health?

Swami Satyananda: The most important attribute of the diet is that it should nourish the dhatus. There are seven *dhatus* or basic body structures: skin, flesh, blood, bone, marrow, fat and semen or ova. Anything which destroys their natural balance should not be taken. The traditional texts on hatha yoga all give dietary advice. *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (1:63) recommends:

*Pushtam sumadthuram snigdham gavyam dhaatupraposhanam;
Manobhilashitam yogyam yogee bhojanamaacharet.*

The yogi should take nourishing and sweet food mixed with ghee and milk; it should nourish the dhatus and be pleasing and suitable.

Although milk and ghee are recommended, large quantities should not be taken. Too much milk creates a mucus problem and if one has an allergic reaction to milk it should not be taken. Excess ghee is stored in the body as fat. If rice creates swelling in the abdomen or fluid retention, leave it.

“Pleasing and suitable” means food which suits the individual body metabolism and which makes one feel healthy, mentally content and stable. Diet differs according to each individual, so it is best to experiment with different foods and quantities in order to find the correct diet.

Many people indulge in food as a means of escape for the mind. When they are tense, frustrated or insecure they eat to relieve the problem. A yogi should always regard food as a medicine which will purify and fuel the body and mind for the maintenance of life and progress in sadhana. Thus the hatha yogi eats cautiously at all times, with awareness and with a higher purpose than sensual pleasure. In *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (1:58) the importance of one’s approach to eating is emphasized:

*Susnigdamadhuraahaarashchaturthaamshavivarjitah;
Bhujyate shivasampreetyai mitaahaarah sa uchyaate.*

Mitahara is defined as agreeable and sweet food, leaving one fourth of the stomach free, and eaten as an offering to please Shiva.

Mitahara means sattvic food, light food which is easy to digest. ‘Sweet food’ means fresh, pleasant tasting food, not particularly that which has extra sugar. Food which is disagreeable means that it is either bad tasting, poisonous to the system or not agreeable to one’s metabolism. The stomach should never be overloaded, it should be half filled with food, one quarter with water and one quarter with air.

Eating 'to please Shiva' means that when taking food the yogi should not feel that he is eating for himself, he should cultivate the attitude that he is nourishing the body for its maintenance so his consciousness can continue its process of unfolding and spiritual evolution.

Shiva is the inner consciousness, the *atma*. Everything the yogi eats should be considered as *prasada* or an offering from the Supreme Being. This is very important for eradicating the sense of ego: 'I' want and 'I' eat. Food is not taken for sense gratification but to sustain the vehicle of the indweller, the *atma*. Therefore, eating should be considered as part of one's *sadhana*. Life itself is a *sadhana*.

Why is it best to eat only seasonal food?

Swami Niranjanananda: Practitioners of hatha yoga should eat a moderate, balanced diet, otherwise the full benefit of the practices will not be derived. Also, eating unsuitable food leads to the possibility of physical ailments. In *Gheranda Samhita* Sage Gheranda says that a practitioner who undertakes yoga without moderating the diet suffers from many diseases and does not make progress in yoga.

The sages have thoughtfully prescribed some dietary rules from ancient times and wherever discussion about diet or food takes place, these rules about which vegetables or fruits should be taken during monsoon or winter are considered. Thus for each season a different type of food is recommended. These rules are particularly observed in villages.

In the modern era, with refrigeration, people have begun keeping and preserving out of season vegetables and fruits, but according to yoga, consuming out of season food has detrimental effects on the body. In *Gheranda Samhita*, Sage Gheranda also says that a *sadhaka* should eat less and should consume a balanced diet.

Is fasting a part of purifying the body in hatha yoga?

Swami Satyananda: The hatha yoga techniques purify the body so thoroughly that if they are practised regularly it is

not necessary to undergo fasting. The hatha yogi should eat regular meals and not make a habit of fasting often. Nevertheless, fasting is useful to stimulate the digestive system, to eliminate toxins and to help bring the senses and mind under control. In sickness it stimulates the body to produce the necessary antibodies to fight disease and rebalance the body structure.

In India many people follow the age-old tradition of fasting in conjunction with the phases of the moon. There are particular days which are conducive for either a full or half-day fast, such as the fourth, ninth, eleventh, fourteenth and fifteenth day of either the bright or dark fortnight. Swami Sivananda says, "Occasional fasting once a month or when passion troubles you much, will suffice."

Though fasting has a lot to offer and many people advocate it, one who devotes many hours to hatha yoga sadhana should not strain the body in such a way. For this reason, *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (1:61) and *Hatharatnavali* (1:73) specifically advise that fasting should be avoided. Any actions which are strenuous and create pain or extreme conditions in the body should not be undertaken by the yogi. Without being fanatical, one should take proper care of the body and avoid any unnecessary strain or injury, as the body is the vehicle to higher consciousness. Of course, one has to be sensible about all these instructions and take into account the situation and conditions.

Why does hatha yoga recommend regularity and routine for sound health?

Swami Sivananda: There are laws of the mental plane. There are laws of physics, astronomy and of mathematics. There are also laws of hygiene and health which govern one's being. In the vast universe, human beings alone break the laws and violate the rules. They wilfully disregard the laws of health, lead a life of dissipation and then wonder why they suffer from diseases and disharmony. They deliberately ignore the rules of hygiene and right living and then weep when they are ailing from an incurable malady.

One should observe regularity in all one's duties and the work one has to perform. Wasting time for many days and working hard for a few days to make up puts a strain on the functions of the body. Heart ache, dizziness and constipation result. One should always manage to take a little rest for a few minutes in the intervals of the various kinds of work and business.

Regulate the hours of sleep, which should not be more than six hours when you are in good health. This can even be reduced to five hours if one does not have much physical fatigue or heavy mental strain. A midday nap should be completely avoided by children and young people. If one has the habit of working late into the night, an hour's nap during the day is refreshing. Always use common sense.

Sleeping is normal for all creatures. Animal and human, sinner and saint alike do it. But there is a limit which is a desirable and beneficial necessity. Too much sleeping makes one lazy, dull and ultimately useless to both society and oneself. For the sadhaka, it is one of the most dangerous habits. Habitual oversleeping increases *tamas* and nullifies *sadhana*, retarding one's progress.

Sadhana must also be well regulated. The period of meditation or the practice of *sirshasana* must be increased gradually and with care. The reduction of sleep should be gradual. When *sadhana* is done by fits and starts there will be no spiritual progress.

The nervous system is extremely sensitive. It responds even to slight changes and causes distraction of the mind. It is therefore necessary that one should lead a well regulated and disciplined life and be moderate in everything.

What state of mind does hatha yoga prescribe for good health?

Swami Sivananda: One must have some occupation to give bodily and mental exercise, and to engage the attention eight or ten hours daily. Anxiety must be avoided, and one must try to sustain one's fortitude against the sorrow which

arises from misfortune. Wrong thinking is the root cause of human sufferings.

Thought is a vital, dynamic living force, the most subtle and irresistible force existing in the universe. It is caused by the vibrations of the psychic prana on the mental substance. It is a force, just like gravitation, cohesion or repulsion. In *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (1:16i) it says:

*Utsaahaatsaahasaaddhairyaattattvajnaanaashcha nishchayaat;
Janasangaparityaagaatshadbhiryogah prasiddhyati.*

Enthusiasm, perseverance, discrimination, unshakeable faith, courage and avoiding the company of common people, are the six which bring success in yoga.

The mind controls the body, so the mind should be kept as cheerful as possible under all circumstances. A strong mind wards off ill health and helps to preserve good health.

The best mental and physical tonic is cheerfulness. If one is cheerful, the cells, tissues and nerves are also cheerful and healthy. Therefore, one must cultivate this virtue again and again and be always cheerful. Laughter and cheerfulness increase the circulation of blood. They are blood tonics. Cheerfulness expands the heart and the brain, and fills the system with harmony and peace.

How does the modern lifestyle affect one's energy?

Swami Sivananda: Life has become complex these days. The struggle for existence is acute and keen. There is unhealthy competition in every walk of life. There is unemployment everywhere. Only brilliant young men with extraordinary qualifications and recommendations get a job in these times. Therefore a great deal of continuous mental and physical strain is imposed on modern humanity by its deadening daily work and unhealthy mode of life.

Man has acquired many artificial habits and has allowed nature's original habits to lapse. He has brought tension to many muscles and nerves through incorrect posture. He has

forgotten the first principles of relaxation. He will have to learn lessons from the cat, dog and the infant in the science of relaxation.

What is meant by impurities in the body?

Swami Niranjanananda: The root cause of ill health is impurities in the body that create disorders. Impurity does not simply imply waste matter, but physical, mental, emotional and spiritual impurity.

Physical impurity is mainly related to diet, its qualities and defects. Food contains many impure elements, including residues from fertilizers and pesticides used in agriculture. Such impurities cannot be completely removed from the diet because most people depend on purchasing food.

What does the vedic tradition say about diet?

Swami Niranjanananda: The vedic tradition stresses that meals should be taken after sunrise and before sunset, but people today do not believe in this way of thinking or adhere to this advice. Meal times are not usually based on what is best for the body. Many people rise late, have breakfast at ten, lunch at two and dinner between eight and nine at night.

Why not eat before sunrise or after sunset? There is a scientific reason behind this theory, linked with the biorhythms of the body. The solar plexus is linked with the digestive system and is activated by the sun. This important fact should always be kept in mind. It explains why observing this simple rule is the first step in remaining free from disease. Certainly some adjustment to meal times can be managed to be in accord with the natural routine of the body. The result will be an improvement in health.

What is the ideal quantity of food to be taken at meal times?

Swami Niranjanananda: Once meal times have been appropriately adjusted, the second rule for keeping the body

disease-free, as emphasized in Ayurveda, is that fifty percent of the stomach should be filled with nutritious food, twenty-five percent with water and the remaining twenty-five percent should be kept empty.

Generally, however, people's eating habits are quite different to this model. When there is good food, they tend to eat more than they require, due to greed and the sense of taste. Diseases, such as high blood cholesterol, are the consequence. Disorders of the blood or stomach are often caused by an uncontrolled diet, as the quantities of vata, pitta and kapha are unbalanced.

How often should food be taken?

Swami Niranjanananda: The third rule that yoga recommends is that meals be taken twice or three times a day, no more. The stomach needs to be regulated in this way as whenever food enters the stomach, digestive juices are produced in the same quantity.

The stomach does not distinguish between a biscuit and a full plate of food, it simply produces digestive juices. If a biscuit is eaten every ten minutes, the stomach will produce the same amount of digestive juices ten times, which may contribute to stomach ulcers or hernia, and possibly liver damage or kidney failure.

If everyone ate a balanced diet at regular times, eighty percent of diseases and disorders would end.

How can hatha yoga be integrated with a busy life?

Swami Niranjanananda: To apply yoga in the home, in the routine, the use of capsules of yoga at different times of the day to attain relaxation, awareness and concentration is recommended. The hatha yoga capsules include asana, pranayama and shatkarma. In the morning before breakfast, asana and pranayama should be practised. This capsule takes about half an hour. On Saturday, some hatha yoga shatkarmas, such as neti, kapalbhati and trataka should be performed.

To move the pranas and remove the blocks from the psychic centres and pranic centres in the body, practise the following asanas after the morning bath and before breakfast: *tadasana*, the palm tree pose, *tiryak tadasana*, the swaying palm tree pose, *kati chakrasana*, the waist rotation pose, *surya namaskara*, salute to the sun, and one inverted posture, such as *sarvangasana*, the shoulder stand. These asanas provide all the stretches the body needs to remove blocks from the pranic system and ensure the flow of energy through the body. These asanas take about twenty minutes to practise.

Just as cell phones must be recharged, there is a need to recharge the brain every morning, and this happens with the practice of pranayama. Two pranayamas are important. One is for regulation of the hormonal functions. For that, *bhramari* is efficient and effective. The other is to build up the capacity to breathe properly so that more of the vital forces from the environment can be absorbed. For that, *nadi shodhana* pranayama, known as alternate nostril breathing, is used. Incorporating a ratio of 1:1, that is, equal length inhalation and exhalation, will help energize the brain and provide inner clarity. These pranayamas take about ten minutes to practise.

On Saturday, instead of the asanas and pranayamas, practise three of the *shatkarmas*: *neti*, nasal cleansing, *kapalbhati*, frontal brain cleansing, and *trataka*, steady gazing. *Laghoo shankhaprakshalana*, the short intestinal wash, and *kunjla*, regurgitative cleansing, are also an option.

This is a good way to apply hatha yoga in daily life. There are other capsules for bringing raja yoga, jnana yoga, mantra yoga and bhakti yoga into one's life, but these are the hatha yoga capsules which can be followed at home.

SPIRITUAL LIFE AND HEALTH

Why is good health important in spiritual life?

Swami Sivananda: What is that precious thing that makes life worth living? It is health. The body is indeed the most essential thing for the attainment of the goal of human existence. Health is the wellspring of virtue, wealth, desire and emancipation; it is the blessedness of life. The laws for the preservation of health should receive one's first and foremost consideration. The laws of health are laws of nature; they cannot be violated with impunity. Those who neglect these laws become victims of incurable disease and drag on a cheerless existence.

Good health is necessary to achieve the four kinds of *purushartha*, goals of life, namely: *dharma*, righteousness, *artha*, wealth, *kama*, desires, and *moksha*, liberation. Without health nothing can be achieved. Without good health one cannot practise asana and pranayama. That is the reason why the scriptures declare that this body is a boat to cross the ocean of samsara: it is an instrument for doing virtuous deeds and attaining moksha, liberation.

How is the concept of the koshas relevant to yogic health management?

Swami Niranjanananda: Although disease is physical, in the body there are five different bodies existing together. Just as yoghurt and butter are contained in milk, but cannot be seen until the milk is churned, similarly one's body also has different modes of expression. According to the yogic system, the manifest physical body is known as *annamaya kosha*; within this is *pranamaya kosha*, the dimension of energy; contained within pranamaya is *manomaya kosha*, the mental dimension; within manomaya is *vijnanamaya kosha*, the dimension of the transcendental mind, and within this transcendental mind exists the experience of *anandamaya kosha*, the body of bliss.

So, when the physical body is worked with, one is influencing and altering the vitality, the mind, the psychic

dimension and also anandamaya. This chain reaction, which starts at the physical level, actually finishes at the spiritual level, and the yoga practices people learn are not only going to help them physically but also mentally and spiritually. This is the concept of yogic management, the real yogic therapy, which leads to health at the outer level and harmony at the mental level. This harmony of mind is the most crucial factor in life.

This entire process begins with the basic practices of yoga, either as a new student or as an old practitioner. One must move from annamaya kosha, learning how to manage stress, ill-health, dissipation of the mind, right up to vijñanamaya kosha, the realm of the psyche. When that has been managed, nothing remains but bliss, harmony and equilibrium. Therefore, start by thinking of yourself as a whole and not just as a physical, material body. Once this can be done, the first step has been taken into the yogic dimension, and you have many miles to go before you rest.

What is the spiritual role of hatha yoga in health?

Swami Satyananda: Hatha yoga is now accepted as a therapeutic science all over the world and many scientific studies have been conducted in this field. Today yoga is taught due to need: man has become sick and medical science is not able to meet the challenge. Hatha yoga, however, is helping everybody. However, without discouraging this aspect, what hatha yoga really stands for should not be forgotten.

Behind every sick man there is a spiritual man. Behind a diabetic there is a yogi. Behind a man suffering from depression there is an aspirant. When a patient comes to a teacher for help, he should be taught yoga to make him better. His sickness must be treated, but the teacher should not stop there: he can be taken further into the spiritual domain of life.

This is the mistake that most yoga teachers make in the West. They just take a patient with arthritis, rheumatism or insomnia, teach him a few exercises and that is it. Hatha

yoga is not being used to treat the total personality. This is why teachers are not able to raise the level of their pupils.

Just improving the physical health is not enough. Mental health must also improve, the nature must change, the personality must change, the psychological and the psychic framework has to change. One should not merely feel freedom from disease, but freedom from bondage and from the vagaries of the mind. The time has come when teachers in every part of the world must understand and transmit the true spirit of hatha yoga.



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HATHA YOGA PRADIPIKA OF YOGI SWATMARAMA

1. Yogic Understanding of Health and Disease

(2:17) Hiccups, asthma, coughs, headache, ear and eye pain, and various other diseases are due to disturbances of the vital air. 43

2. Yoga for Health Management

(2:25) There is no doubt that coughs, asthma, diseases of the spleen, leprosy and twenty kinds of diseases caused by excess mucus are destroyed through the effects of dhauti karma. 71

(3:96) According to the Kapalika sect, amaroli is practised by drinking the cool midstream of urine. The first part of the urine is left as it contains bile, and the last part is left as it does not contain goodness 108

6. Hatha Yoga for Abdominal and Pelvic Health

(2:34) Nauli is foremost of the hatha yoga practices. It kindles the digestive fire, removing indigestion, sluggish digestion, and all disorders of the doshas, and brings about happiness. 176

(2:24) A strip of wet cloth, four angulas wide (seven to eight centimetres) and fifteen handspans (one and a half metres) in length is slowly swallowed and then taken out, as instructed by the guru. This is known as dhauti. 189

(2:27) Enlargement of the glands and spleen, and all diseases arising from excess wind, bile and mucus are eliminated from the body through the practice of basti. 194

(2:28) By practising jala basti the appetite increases, the body glows, excess doshas are destroyed and the dhatu, senses and mind are purified. 194

9. Hatha Yoga for Mental Health

(1:67) Asanas, various types of khumbaka, and the other various means of illumination should all be practised in the hatha yoga system until success in raja yoga is attained. 234

(2:68) Breathe in quickly, making a reverberating sound like the male black bee, and exhale slowly while softly making

the sound of the female black bee. By this yogic practice one becomes lord of the yogis and the mind is absorbed in bliss. 235

(1:15) Overeating, exertion, talkativeness, adhering to rules, being in the company of common people and unsteadiness (wavering mind) are the six (causes) which destroy yoga. 237

(1:32) Lying flat on the ground with the face upwards, in the manner of a dead body, is shavasana. It removes tiredness and enables the mind (and whole body) to relax. 243

10. Living Yoga

(1:63) The yogi should take nourishing and sweet food mixed with ghee and milk; it should nourish the dhatus and be pleasing and suitable. 275

(1:58) Mitahara is defined as agreeable and sweet food, leaving one fourth of the stomach free, and eaten as an offering to please Shiva. 276

(1:16i) Enthusiasm, perseverance, discrimination, unshakeable faith, courage and avoiding the company of common people, are the six which bring success in yoga. 280

HATHARATNAVALI OF SRINIVASA BHATTA MAHAYOGINDRA

5. Hatha Yoga and the Respiratory System

(1:40) This best neti cleanses the frontal sinuses, bestows keen eyesight and destroys the multitude of diseases in the region above the clavicle. Thus, Srinivasa yogi has explained neti. 158

6. Hatha Yoga for Abdominal and Pelvic Health

(1:33) Nauli, the crown of hatha practices, makes the gastric fire blaze up, improves digestion etc., invariably brings a feeling of wellbeing and completely destroys all disorders and diseases. 175

(1:41) Basti is said to be of two types: water and air. After doing chakrikarma according to the best of one's effort, one should practise basti. 191

- (1:42) Collecting air in the stomach, release it through the lower passage (anus). Vayu basti is explained; Now I will speak about jala basti. 191
- (1:43) Now jala basti: Standing in water up to the navel region, put the finger in the passage of the anus. Through the chakri process, the stomach should be filled with water through the anus. 192
- (1:44) Then, after doing vichitra karani, one should draw out the water without fear. Draw the water according to your strength, wait for some moments then expel it. 192
- (1:46) Practice of basti karma certainly removes diseases like inflammation of the spleen, abdominal disorders and also disorders caused by the three humours of vata, pitta and kapha. 192
- (1:47) Practice of jala basti streamlines the body constituents, brings about poise to the internal (sense) organs, offers brightness, stimulates digestive power and completely alleviates chronic disorders. 192
- (1:29) Piles, diseases of the spleen and distended stomach are cured; evacuation of the bowels, and stimulation of the digestive fire take place through chakrikarma. 200

8. Hatha Yoga for Other Physical Conditions

- (1: 53) Trataka, which clears eye diseases and prevents sloth, should be valued and kept secret with the same effort as one keeps a casket of precious stones. 225

GHERANDA SAMHITA OF SAGE GHERANDA

1. Yogic Understanding of Health and Disease

- (2:9) Keeping the left foot over the right thigh and the right foot over the left thigh, bring the arms behind by vyukram method and catch hold of the left big toe with right hand and the right big toe firmly with the left hand, look at the nosetip keeping the chin in contact with the heart. It eradicates all diseases. It is called padmasana. 36
- (5:1) Now I shall explain the technique of pranayama, by the mere practice of which a human being becomes like a god (a deva). 53

2. Yoga for Health Management

(1:10) Through shatkarmas purification of body and through asanas firmness, through mudras steadiness and through pratyahara patience is achieved. 66

(1:35) There are three types of hrid dhauti: using a stick, regurgitating water, and using cloth. 72

6. Hatha Yoga for Abdominal and Pelvic Health

(2:42–43) Keep the body, from the toes to the navel, on the floor, and placing the palms of the hands also firmly on the floor, raise the head like a snake. This is called bhujangasana. The fire of the body increases, all diseases are destroyed and kundalini shakti is awakened by the practice of bhujangasana. 169

(1:17) Drink water slowly through the mouth up to the throat. The abdomen is then moved and the water evacuated through the anus. 181

(1:18) The technique of varisara dhauti is most secret. It purifies the body. A yogi who perfects this technique attains a divine body. 181

(1:16) Vatsara is a very secret technique for purging the body. It destroys all diseases and activates the gastric fire, which helps to digest food. 183

(1:41) The practice of vastra dhauti rectifies skin problems, fever, enlarged spleen, leprosy and kapha (phlegm) and pitta (bile) disorders. It keeps the body free of disease, increases stamina and cheerfulness, and promotes healthy growth. 190

(1:49) It removes diseases of the stomach and bowels and enhances the digestive fire. 194

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Glossary

Abhyasa – constant and steady practice without any interruption, which is performed with an attitude of reverence; to remain established in the effort of sadhana.

Acharya – spiritual preceptor, master.

Agni – fire; the god of fire.

Agnisar, agnisara kriya – a breathing technique which strengthens the diaphragm and lower stomach region and awakens the digestive fire.

Agnisara dhauti – another name for agnisara kriya. See Agnisara kriya. See Dhauti.

Ahamkara – faculty of ego, awareness of the existence of ‘I’; one of the four parts of the antahkarana or inner instrument. See Antahkarana.

Ajapa japa – continuous, spontaneous repetition of mantra; meditation practice in which mantra is coordinated with breath.

Ajna chakra – psychic/pranic centre situated at the medulla oblongata at the top of the spinal column in the mid-brain; seat of intuition, higher knowledge; third eye.

Akarna dhanurasana – bow and arrow pose, a standing asana.

Amaroli – drinking one’s own urine in order to detoxify the body and develop immunity, stamina and vitality.

Anahata chakra – psychic/pranic centre situated in the spine behind the sternum; associated physically with the cardiac

plexus, heart and lungs, mentally with emotion, especially love, and spiritually with atma, the spirit.

Ananda – pure bliss; natural state of consciousness.

Anandamaya kosha – sheath or body of bliss; the innermost wrapper or sheath of the embodied spirit. See Kosha.

Anna – food; matter.

Annamaya kosha – sheath or body of matter; the sphere of existence created by food, maintained by food and which ultimately becomes food, i.e. the body. See Kosha.

Antahkarana – literally, ‘inner tool’, experienced or manifest mind, consisting of: ahamkara, manas, buddhi and chitta.

Antar dhauti – a category of shatkarma; internal cleansing techniques. See Dhauti.

Antar mouna – inner silence; meditative technique belonging to the fifth step of raja yoga (pratyahara).

Apana vayu – one of the pancha pranas or vayus, it is located between the navel and the perineum. It flows downward and controls elimination and reproduction.

Ardha matsyendrasana – half spinal twist, a seated posture.

Ardha shalabhasana – half locust pose, a backward bending asana.

Artha – prosperity; material need; accomplishment; attainment in all spheres of life; one of the four purusharthas. See Purushartha.

Asana – a specific yoga posture; used in hatha yoga to channel prana, open the chakras and remove energy blocks; in raja yoga, a physical posture in which one is at ease and in harmony with oneself.

Ashanti – restlessness; absence of peace of mind.

Ashwini mudra – horse gesture; a yogic practice to redirect energy upwards; mudra involving contraction of the anal sphincter.

Atma, atman – the self beyond mind and body; principle of life, highest reality, Supreme Consciousness, spirit, soul.

Atma-sakshatkara – self-realization.

Aum – the universal cosmic mantra representing the four states of consciousness; the sound indicating the Supreme

Reality or Brahman; conveys concepts of omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence.

Avastha – state of consciousness or condition of the mind; states of mind in nada yoga practice according to *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*.

Avidya – ignorance of reality; ignorance.

Ayurveda – science of health or medicine; the vedic system of medical diagnosis and treatment.

Baddha padmasana – locked lotus pose.

Bandha – psycho-muscular energy locks which close the pranic exits (like throat, anus); psychic locks that concentrate the flow of energy in the body at one point or plexus.

Bandha hasta utthanasana – hand-raising pose, a standing asana.

Basti – one of the shatkarmas; yogic enema.

Bhakti yoga – branch of yoga in which emotional energy is channelled towards a divine relationship; a systematic path with nine stages which expand, strengthen, and purify the emotions.

Bhastrika pranayama – bellows breathing; pranayama in which the breath is forcibly drawn in and out through the nose in equal proportions, like the pumping action of the bellows.

Bhoga – sensual enjoyment; external experience.

Bhramari pranayama – humming bee breath; a breathing technique in which a sound like a honey bee is made.

Bhujangasana – the cobra pose, a backward bending asana.

Buddhi – discerning, discriminating aspect of the mind; aspect of the mind closest to pure consciousness; one of the four parts of the antahkarana or inner instrument. See Antahkarana.

Chakra – circle, wheel or vortex; pranic/psychic centre; confluence point of energy flows (nadis) in the body; the seven major chakras for descent of divine energy or for human evolution are sahasrara, ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana and mooladhara.

Chakrasana – wheel pose; a backward bending asana.

Chakrikarma – Another name for moola shodhana. See Moola shodhana.

Chintan – thinking, thought; worry, care, anxiety.

Chitta – individual consciousness, including the subconscious and unconscious layers of mind; thinking, concentration, attention, enquiry; storehouse of memory or samskaras; one of the four parts of the antahkarana or inner instrument. See Antahkarana.

Chitta shakti – the power of pure consciousness; mental force governing the subtle dimensions.

Danda – stick, staff; stem or stalk from a lotus or tree.

Deva – being of light; divine being.

Devadeham – a divine, lustrous, brilliant and light body like that of a god.

Dhanurasana – bow pose, a backward bending asana.

Dharana – practice of concentration or complete attention; sixth stage of ashtanga yoga described in Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* as holding or binding the mind to one point.

Dharma – the natural role one plays in life; ethical law; duty; the laws or fundamental support of life; righteousness; one of the four purusharthas. See Purushartha.

Dhatu – seven constituents of the body: blood, bone, marrow, fat, semen, skin and flesh.

Dhauti – one of the shatkarmas; cleansing techniques for the digestive system, chest and head.

Dhyana – spontaneous state of meditation; one-pointedness of mind through concentration on either a form, thought or sound; absorption in the object of meditation; seventh stage of Sage Patanjali's ashtanga yoga.

Divya drishti – inner vision, divine vision.

Dosha – three humours of the body described in Ayurveda: mucus (kapha), bile (pitta) and wind (vata). Their imbalance prevents the flow of energy in sushumna nadi.

Gaja karani – a technique of dhauti, one of the six cleansing practices of hatha yoga (shatkarma) in which the contents of the stomach are vomited.

Garudasana – eagle pose, a balancing asana.

Gatyatmak paschimottanasana – dynamic back stretch pose.

Ghata – mud pot; vessel.

Gheranda Samhita – traditional text on hatha yoga by Sage Gheranda. It explains seven limbs (saptanga) of yoga: shatkarma, asana, mudra, pratyahara, pranayama, dhyana and samadhi.

Gheranda, Sage – author of *Gheranda Samhita*, a classical yoga text which describes seven limbs of yoga.

Gomukhasana – cow's face pose, seated backward bending asana.

Guru – one who dispels the darkness caused by ignorance (avidya); teacher of the science of ultimate reality who by the light of his own atma can dispel darkness, ignorance and illusion from the mind and enlighten the consciousness of a devotee/disciple; preceptor.

Ha, ham – seed mantra of solar energy, pranic force (pingala nadi); represents the sun; first syllable of the word 'hatha'. See Tha.

Halasana – the plough pose; an inverted posture.

Ham – mantra produced by the breath, unconsciously repeated on exhalation; representing individual consciousness; bija mantra of the space element and vishuddhi chakra. See So. See Soham.

Hatha yoga – a system of yoga specifically using practices for bodily purification; yoga of attaining physical and mental purity and balancing the prana (energy) in ida and pingala nadis so that sushumna nadi opens, enabling the experiences of samadhi. See Ha. See Tha.

Hatha Yoga Pradipika – a major classical text on hatha yoga compiled by Yogi Swatmarama, usually translated as 'Light on Hatha Yoga'.

Hatharatnavali – a late medieval treatise on hatha yoga and tantra by Srinivasa Bhatta Mahayogindra.

Hiranyagarbha – cosmic mind or subtle body; Brahman; golden seed of the unity of life; it is said that Brahman alone is creating himself from his own substance.

Hrid – interior of the body; the heart; core.

Ida nadi – a major pranic channel running from the left side of mooladhara chakra to the left side of ajna chakra, governing the left side of the body and the right side of the brain. The ida energy flow criss-crosses the spine through the major chakras between mooladhara and ajna, conducting the passive aspect of prana manifesting as the mental force, lunar force or chitta shakti; also called chandra nadi as the lunar energy flows through it.

Jala – water.

Jalandhara bandha – throat lock; practice in which the chin rests forward upon the upper sternum.

Japa – a meditation practice involving repetition of a mantra.

Jnana yoga – yoga of knowledge and wisdom attained through spontaneous self-analysis and study of scriptures; leading a discriminative lifestyle, living with wisdom.

Jnanendriya – organ of sense perceptions and knowledge; five in number, viz. ears, eyes, nose, tongue and skin.

Kaki mudra – the crow's beak gesture; a head mudra in which the breath is inhaled through pursed lips.

Kali – primal manifestation of Shakti; wife of Shiva; deity, divine mother; destroyer of time, space and object, i.e. ignorance.

Kama – emotional, sensual fulfillment; love; lust; one of the four purusharthas. See Purushartha.

Kandharasana – shoulder pose, a backward bending asana.

Kapalbhati – frontal brain cleansing breath; a pranayama and one of the six major cleansing techniques, shatkarmas of hatha yoga; process of purifying the frontal region of the brain by breathing rapidly through the nostrils with emphasis on exhalation.

Kapha – mucus, phlegm, one of the three humours (doshas) described in Ayurveda; associated with the water element. See Dosha.

Karma – action and result; law of cause and effect.

Karma yoga – yogic path of action; union with the Supreme Consciousness through action; action without attachment to the fruits of action.

Karmendriya – motor organ; there are five physical organs of action, viz. vocal cords, hands, feet, genital organ and anus.

Kati chakrasana – waist rotating pose, a dynamic spinal twist.

Kauva chalasana – crow walking, a dynamic squatting asana.

Khechari mudra – literally, ‘the attitude of moving in space’; tongue lock; a hatha yoga practice in which the elongated tongue passes back into the pharynx to stimulate the flow of life-giving nectar (amrita), whereas in the milder raja yoga form the tongue is inserted in, or folded backwards towards, the upper cavity of the palate.

Kirtan – singing of God’s name; practice in which a group of people sing a collection of mantras.

Koormasana – tortoise pose, an advanced forward bending posture.

Kosha – sheath or body; a dimension of experience and existence. The five koshas are: annamaya kosha, pranamaya kosha, manomaya kosha, vijñanamaya kosha, and anandamaya kosha.

Kriya – action; cleansing practice (shatkarma); practice of kriya yoga.

Kriya yoga – practices of kundalini yoga designed to hasten spiritual evolution.

Kumbhaka – internal or external retention of the breath.

Kundalini – the evolutionary energy in a human being; spiritual energy; Devi described as the potential energy of a human being dormant in mooladhara chakra, which when awakened, awakens the chakras, resulting in progressive enlightenment.

Kundalini yoga – path of yoga which awakens the dormant spiritual force, kundalini. See Kundalini.

Kunjal – cleansing the stomach by voluntary vomiting using warm saline water; one of the hatha yoga shatkarmas (cleansing techniques).

Laghoo shankhaprakshalana – short intestinal wash; a practice of dhauti; one of the hatha yoga shatkarmas (cleansing techniques).

Laya yoga – literally, ‘union by absorption’; yoga of conscious dissolution of individuality.

Madhyama nauli – central abdominal contraction; a stage of nauli. See Nauli.

Maha bandha – the great lock; a combination of jalandhara bandha, uddiyana bandha and moola bandha, practised with external breath retention.

Maha mudra – literally, ‘great attitude’; in this sitting posture the apertures at the top and bottom of the trunk are held fast and sealed. In kriya yoga it combines moola bandha, akashi mudra, khechari mudra and shambhavi mudra along with rotation of awareness through specific nadis and chakras.

Mahatma – literally, ‘great soul’; used with reference to a person who has destroyed the ego and realized the self as one with all.

Makarasana – crocodile pose, a backward bending asana.

Mal – impurity; dirt; impurity of mind such as lust, greed, anger.

Manas shakti – mental energy.

Mandala – visual image, form or symbol which one may visualize or concentrate on, externally or internally, may be two or three-dimensional; circular symbolic pictorial depiction of cosmic power and/or the human psyche.

Manipura chakra – literally, ‘city of jewels’; psychic/pranic centre situated in the spine behind the navel; associated with the solar plexus and digestive organs and mentally with willpower; source of vitality and energy.

Manomaya kosha – mental sheath or body; mental sphere of life and awareness. See Kosha.

Mantra – words of power; sound vibrations which liberate the mind when repeated.

Marjari-asana – cat-stretch pose, a dynamic asana flexing the spine.

Matsyasana – fish pose; a backward bending asana performed from padmasana.

Matsyendranath, Yogi – one of the founders of hatha yoga; guru of Yogi Gorakhnath; also known as Yogi Matsyendra.

Matsyendrasana – see Ardha matsyendrasana. See Poorna matsyendrasana.

Maya – means by which Brahman creates the phenomenal world; power of creation; illusive power; in Vedanta philosophy, the two powers of maya are: 1. the power of veiling, and 2. the power of projection; in Samkhya philosophy, another name for Prakriti.

Mayurasana – peacock pose, an advanced balancing asana.

Mitahara – sattwic food; fresh and digestible food eaten moderately and appreciatively.

Moksha – liberation from the cycles of birth and death and the illusion of maya; one of the four purusharthas. See Purushartha.

Moola bandha – perineum contraction; contraction of the perineal body in the male and the cervix in the female body; technique used for locating and awakening mooladhara chakra.

Moola shodhana – a technique of dhauti, one of the six cleansing practices of hatha yoga (shatkarma) in which the anus is cleansed with the finger or a turmeric root. See Shatkarma.

Mooladhara chakra – the lowest psychic/pranic centre in the human body; situated in the perineal floor in men and the cervix in women; associated physically with the coccygeal plexus, excretory and reproductive organs, and mentally with the instinctive nature; spiritually it is the seat of kundalini.

Mudra – gesture; psychic, emotional, devotional, and aesthetic gestures; attitudes of energy intended to link individual pranic force with universal or cosmic force; grain, as in one of the panchamakara of tantra.

Nadi – flow; a river or channel of energy; psychic current; subtle channel in the pranic body, conducting the flow of shakti; comparable to the meridians of acupuncture.

Nadi shodhana pranayama – nadi purification; a pranayama designed to purify and balance the two main energy flows of the body, ida and pingala nadis.

Nasikagra drishti – nosetip gazing; a practice to stimulate mooladhara chakra.

Nauli – abdominal massaging; one of the shatkarmas in which the rectus abdominis muscles are contracted and isolated vertically.

Neti – one of the shatkarmas; nasal cleansing with saline water (jala neti), a waxed string (sutra neti) or other elements.

Nishkama karma yoga – action without expectation of fruits and done without personal interest or egoism in order to come closer to the absolute reality.

Niyama – observance of rules or rules of personal discipline to render the mind tranquil in preparation for meditation; the second step of the eight limbs (ashtanga yoga) of Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*: shaucha (purity), santosha (contentment), tapas (austerity), swadhyaya (self-study) and Ishwara pranidhana (surrender to God).

Om – See Aum.

Padahastasana – hand to foot pose, a standing forward bend.

Padmasana – lotus pose; classical meditative posture.

Pancha prana – five major divisions of the pranic energy located in the physical body, viz. apana, prana, samana, udana, vyana; also called vayu.

Paschimottanasana – back stretching pose; a forward bending posture.

Patanjali, Sage – author of the *Yoga Sutras*; an ancient rishi who codified the system of raja yoga, including ashtanga yoga.

Pawanmuktasana – a group of asanas that remove any blockages preventing free flow of energy in the body and mind; three groups of asanas: the anti-rheumatic group, the digestive/abdominal group, and the energy block releasing group (shakti bandhas).

Pingala nadi – a major pranic channel in the body which conducts the dynamic pranic force manifesting as prana shakti from the right side of mooladhara chakra, criss-crossing the spine through the major chakras to the right side of ajna chakra; associated with the mundane realm of

experience and externalized awareness; also called surya nadi as the solar energy flows through it.

Pitta – bile, one of the three humours (doshas) described in Ayurveda; associated with the fire element. See Dosha.

Poorna matsyendrasana – full spinal twist, an advanced asana which the great yogi Matsyendra used for meditation.

Prana – vital energy force sustaining life and creation, permeating the whole of creation and existing in both the macrocosmos and microcosmos.

Prana shakti – energy; dynamic solar force governing the dimension of matter; energy flow related to externalization of mind; the force of prana.

Prana vayu – pranic air current; also refers to a specific current, one of the pancha pranas or vayus, located in the thoracic region, from the throat to the diaphragm, responsible for processes of inspiration and absorption.

Prana vidya – knowledge and control of prana; a healing technique involving awareness and movement of prana.

Pranamaya kosha – energy sheath, or vital pranic body; the sheath covering the self which is composed of pranic vibration and the rhythm of pranic forces. See Kosha.

Pranayama – a series of techniques using the breath to control the flow of prana within the body.

Prasad – favour, grace; blessed gift or object, something full of grace.

Pratyahara – restraining the sensory and motor organs; withdrawal and emancipation of the mind from the domination of the senses and sensual objects; training the senses to follow the mind within; fifth stage of ashtanga yoga described by Sage Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*.

Purushartha – human attainment; self-effort; the four basic needs or desires to be fulfilled in life, viz. artha (wealth), kama (desire), dharma (duty), moksha (liberation).

Raja yoga – the supreme yoga; union through control of the mental processes and concentration of the mind; the most authoritative text is Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* which contains ashtanga yoga, the eightfold path.

Rakshasa – demon, evil spirit.

Ramakrishna Paramahansa – (1836–1886) Indian saint and mystic who perfected sadhanas from all religions; guru of Swami Vivekananda.

Rishi – seer; realized sage; one who contemplates or meditates on the Self.

Sadhaka – one who practises sadhana; a spiritual aspirant.

Sadhana – spiritual practice or discipline performed regularly.

Samadhi – the culmination of meditation, state of oneness of the mind with the object of concentration and the universal consciousness; self-realization; the eighth stage of raja yoga.

Samana vayu – one of the five pancha pranas or vayus, it is located between the navel and the diaphragm; it flows from side to side and controls the digestion.

Samsara – illusory world; the course or circuit of worldly life; unending cycle of birth and death.

Samskara – mental impression stored in the subtle body as an archetype; the impressions which condition one's nature, causing one to react or respond in a certain way.

Sankalpa – positive resolve; purpose, aim, intention; willpower.

Sannyasin – one who has taken sannyasa initiation, surrendering everything to the guru and the spiritual journey.

Saral bhujangasana – easy cobra pose, a backward bending posture.

Saral dhanurasana – easy bow pose, a backward bend.

Sarvangasana – shoulder stand pose; an inverted posture.

Sattwa – one of the three gunas, or attributes of nature; state of luminosity, harmony, equilibrium and purity.

Shakti – primal energy; manifest consciousness; power, ability, capacity, strength, energy; counterpart of Shiva; the moving power of nature and consciousness; in Hindu mythology Shakti is often symbolized as a divine woman.

Shakti bandhas – energy block postures; a group of dynamic asanas aimed at improving the energy flow within the body.

- Shalabhasana** – the locust pose; a backward bend.
- Shambhavi mudra** – eyebrow centre gazing; psychic attitude focused on Shiva (Supreme Consciousness).
- Shankhaprakshalana** – literally, ‘cleaning the conch’; a cleansing technique (shatkarma) of hatha yoga that uses saline water to clean the stomach (which is shaped like a conch) and the small and large intestines.
- Shashankasana** – the hare pose; a forward bending asana performed from vajrasana.
- Shatkarma** – the six hatha yoga techniques of purification: neti, dhauti, basti, nauli, kapalbhati and trataka.
- Shavasana** – the corpse pose; a relaxation posture.
- Sheetali pranayama** – the cooling breath; a tranquillizing pranayama.
- Sheetkari pranayama** – the hissing breath; a tranquillizing pranayama.
- Shiva** – state of pure consciousness, individual and cosmic, original source of yoga. Lord of yogis; auspicious, benevolent one; name of the god of the Hindu trinity who is entrusted with the work of destruction; destroyer of the ego and duality.
- Shodhana, shodhanam** – first limb of Sage Gheranda’s saptanga yoga; purification.
- Shuddhi** – purification, purity.
- Siddha yoni asana** – classical meditation posture, the male equivalent is siddhasana.
- Siddhasana** – accomplished pose; classical cross-legged meditation posture.
- Siddhi** – perfection; enhanced pranic and psychic capacity; paranormal or supernormal accomplishment; control of mind and prana; eight supernatural powers obtained by yogis as a result of long practice.
- Simha kriya** – another name for simhagarjanasana (roaring lion pose). See Simhagarjanasana.
- Simhagarjanasana** – roaring lion pose, an asana performed from simhasana.
- Sirshasana** – headstand pose.

So – mantra produced by the breath, unconsciously repeated on inhalation; representing Cosmic Consciousness. See Ham. See Soham.

Soham – mantra used in ajapa japa, said to be the unconscious repetitive prayer produced by the breath itself.

Supta vajrasana – sleeping thunderbolt pose, a backward bending asana performed from vajrasana.

Surya namaskara – salutations to the sun; a dynamic series of twelve postures.

Sushumna – central energy flow (nadi) in the spine; it conducts the kundalini or spiritual force from mooladhara chakra to sahasrara chakra; the main energy flow related to transcendental awareness; situated in the spinal cord of the human body, it opens when balance is achieved between ida and pingala nadis.

Sutra – thread.

Swadhisthana chakra – literally, ‘one’s own abode’; second psychic/pranic centre; located in the coccyx; associated with the sacral plexus and governing the urogenital system; the storehouse of subconscious impressions.

Swami – literally, ‘master of the mind’; master of the self; title of sannyasins.

Swaroopa – one’s own form or shape; natural state or condition; essential nature; true constitution.

Tadan kriya – beating action; practice in which the body is raised on the two hands, and the buttocks are repeatedly raised from and returned to the floor.

Tadasana – palm tree pose, a balancing asana including traction of the spine.

Tamas – one of the three gunas or attributes of nature; inertia, stability; ignorance, darkness; unwillingness to change.

Tantra – most ancient universal science and culture which deals with the transition of human nature from the present level of evolution and understanding to a transcendental level of knowledge, experience and awareness; a particular path of sadhana including mantra, yantra and other esoteric practices.

Tha, tham – seed mantra of lunar energy, psychic or mental force (ida nadi); represents moon; second syllable of the word ‘hatha’. See Ha.

Tiryak tadasana – swaying palm tree pose, a side-bending standing asana.

Trataka – one of the shatkarmas; a technique of gazing steadfastly upon an object such as a candle flame, black dot or yantra with unblinking eyes.

Trikonasana – triangle pose; a side-bending standing asana.

Uddiyana bandha – abdominal retraction lock; drawing in of the abdomen towards the backbone after exhaling.

Ujjayi pranayama – a subtle pranayama often used during meditation; the psychic breath.

Upanishads – the philosophical portion of the Vedas, traditionally 108 in number; containing intimate dialogues and discussions between guru and disciple on the nature of the Absolute and the path leading towards it; literally, ‘to sit near and listen’ (to the spiritual teacher).

Vajrasana – thunderbolt pose; a kneeling meditative posture.

Vajroli mudra – contraction and release of the male urinary passage to stimulate swadhisthana chakra and promote brahmacharya; controlling the emissions during sexual intercourse according to hatha yoga texts.

Varisara dhauti – a technique of dhauti, one of the six cleansing practices of hatha yoga (shatkarma) in which the entire alimentary canal from mouth to anus is cleansed with water; also called shankhaprakshalana. See Shatkarma. See Shankhaprakshalana.

Vasana – subtle impressions which are the seeds of desires.

Vastra – cloth.

Vata – wind, gas; one of the three humours (doshas) described in Ayurveda; associated with the air element. See Dosha.

Vatsara dhauti – a technique of dhauti, one of the six cleansing practices of hatha yoga (shatkarma); the process of cleaning the stomach by air. See Shatkarma.

Vedas – ancient texts revealed to the sages and saints of India, explaining and regulating every aspect of life from the

Supreme Reality to worldly affairs; four in number: Rig, Yajur, Sama, Atharva, which are further divided into the Samhita, Brahmana, Aranyaka and Upanishads; the oldest books in the library of mankind, parts of them revealed to sages and seers before 5,000 BC.

Vijnanamaya kosha – astral or psychic (higher mental) sheath or body; one of the sheaths of the soul, consisting of the principle of intellect or buddhi, the subtler level of our own existence with its vision, intuition, wisdom and power of understanding; the covering of the self which is made of knowledge. See Kosha.

Vikara – the condition of change; modification, generally with reference to the modifications of the mind.

Vikshepa – dissipation; the tossing of the mind which obstructs concentration.

Vipareeta karani asana – inverted pose, also known as the half shoulder stand pose.

Virakti – disinterest; indifference.

Vishuddhi chakra – literally, ‘centre of purification’, the psychic/pranic centre located at the level of the throat pit or the thyroid gland; it is the psychic centre particularly connected with purification and communication.

Vrischikasana – scorpion pose, an advanced balancing asana including a strong backward bend.

Vyadhi – disease, sickness, illness; one of the unavoidable sufferings of life.

Vyaghrasana – tiger pose, a dynamic asana stretching the back and legs.

Yama – self-restraints or rules of conduct which render the mind tranquil; first stage of the eight limbs of yoga (ashtanga yoga) of Sage Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*: ahimsa (non-violence), satya (truth), asteya (honesty), brahmacharya (continence) and aparigraha (abstention from greed).

Yantra – a geometric symbol of cosmic power designed to unleash the hidden potential energy and consciousness; used in meditation and concentration practices.

Yoga – union; the root is yuj, meaning ‘to join’, ‘to yoke’; a system of practice leading to a state of union between the individual and universal awareness; practices, philosophy and lifestyle to achieve peace, power and spiritual wisdom as well as perfect health, a sound mind and a balanced personality; one of the six main systems of Indian philosophy.

Yoga nidra – psychic sleep; practice in which the body sleeps while the mind remains aware as its movements are guided and quietened by instructions, inducing deep relaxation of body, mind and emotions.

Yoga Sutras – ancient authoritative text on raja yoga by Sage Patanjali.

Yoga Upanishads – a group of approximately twenty-two Upanishads more specifically concerned with yoga. See Upanishads.

Yogamudrasana – psychic union pose, a forward bend performed from padmasana.

Yogi – an adept of yoga; follower of the yoga system of philosophy and practice.

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